



EMERALD POINTS

CONFLICT, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Insights from the West Bank
and the Gaza Strip

IBRAHIM NATIL



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Insights from the West Bank and
the Gaza Strip

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ABBREVIATIONS

Civil Society Organisations	(CSOs)
Development Assistance Committee	(DAC)
European Union	(EU)
International Non-Governmental Organisations	(INGOs)
Islamic Resistance Movement	(Hamás)
Non-Governmental Organisations	(NGOs)
Occupied Palestinian Territories	(OPT)
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	(OECD)
Palestinian Authority	(PA)
Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics	(PCBS)
Palestinian Liberation Organisation	(PLO)
Palestinian National Liberation Movement	(Fatah)
Palestinian Non-Governmental Organisations Network	(PNGO)
United Nation Development Programme	(UNDP)
United Nation Security Council Resolution	(UNSCR)
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	(OCHA)
United Nations Relief and Working Agency	(UNRWA)
United States Agency for International Development	(USAID)
Women's Young Islamic Association	(WYIA)

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INTRODUCTION

The [UNDP \(1994\)](#) defines human security, which is achieved when people can exercise their choices safely and freely and when they can be relatively confident that the opportunities they have today will not be entirely lost tomorrow (pp. 22–34). The Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank cannot plan their own day without any interruption. The Palestinian people are used to the daily lifestyle of suffering and the absence of human security; they have lost their top priority of securing their own basic human needs during the failure of ‘peace process’ and the collective punishment policies exercised by the foreign occupation. The entire society faces now tough challenges including occupation, creeping annexation and covid19. They have lost their own economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, political and human security, owing to the circumstances imposed by the Israeli occupation, lack of freedom, pollution and a devastated economy, the absence of peace and the Palestinian division ([Jad, 2007, 2018](#); [Natil, 2019, 2020](#); [Wildeman, 2019](#)).

Activists’ experience of occupation policies exercises power, which focuses on controlling and disciplining bodies. These policies of violence and control create insecurity in their daily experiences of conflict; however, their peaceful resistance to the occupation can be found embedded within daily life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) ([Ryan, 2016](#)). Ordinary citizens including civil society activists and women local leaders witness an unprecedented state of poor public freedom and socio-political deadlock. They also suffer from ineffective, inefficient and insufficient public policies, which have made their lives much worse at all levels, created by the paralysed political system, social and geographic division, and harsh economic life ([Jad, 2007, 2018](#); [Natil, 2019, 2020](#)). Peaceful civil society activist’s power can also be embedded in non-violent struggle and popular protest despite the fact of the uncertain future of unarmed resistance in the OPT ([Darweish & Rigby, 2015](#)).

In the early months of the 'Oslo Peace Process', many civil society groups established non-government organisations (NGOs) in order to contribute to the 'state-building' as a part of NGOisation development process as Islah Jad (2007, 2018) argues. This state-building process, however, includes the elections, the failure of the peace process and division while civil society organisations' (CSOs') participation in the early days of 'state institution building', hoping for peace and prosperity based on human rights and for democracy, justice and the rule of law (Wildeman, 2019, p. 153). It has been a huge challenge to run community participation programmes in a highly politicised and polarised society since the failure of the Oslo Peace Process in July 2000 (Hanafi & Cuhadar, 2010, p. 207). CSOs have been active contributors to relief, human rights, development and the empowerment process of civil society since the beginning of Palestine cause or the Palestine/Israel conflict (Hanafi & Cuhadar, 2010, p. 211; Natil, 2014, 2019, 2020).

CSOs include a diverse set of organisations, ranging from small, informal, community-based organisations to the large international NGOs working through local CSOs across southern countries (UNDP, 2013, p. 123). With a diverse range of CSOs, objectives and actions that target local, national and international issues, the CSO sector is an expansive terrain characterised by dynamic relationships between agents of action, the causes they serve and the communities that benefit from their activities (Natil, 2020, pp. 10–17). Organisations, such as trade unions or professional associations, for example, prefer to label themselves CSOs not NGOs. CSOs have the capacity to drive innovation and provide humanitarian relief in the face of natural disasters, war and other crises around the world. Islah Jad (2007, 2018), however, argues that Palestinian civil society is largely depoliticised and lost its previous agenda and capacity to organise and mobilise different women's group, for example, to combat occupation. Repressive regimes, however, have been found to control these organisations by imposing a system of dominating financial channels (Weeden, 2015). Natil (2019, 2020) discusses the barriers facing civil society and their abilities to cope with and operate within shifting conditions, restrictive political environments and despite the complexity of the sociocultural and economic context. Occupying the ground between business and government, the CSO sector faces a number of regulatory and financial challenges that affect its overall health and sustainability (Natil, 2020, pp. 10–17).

Although the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has traditionally used the term NGO, NGOs have included participatory elements in their programmes and functions as Bherer, Dufour, and Montambeault (2016) argue. OECD, however, has adopted the definition of CSOs:

[CSOs] can be defined to include all non-market and non-state organisations outside of the family in which people organize themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain. Examples include community-based organizations and village associations, environmental groups, women's rights groups, farmers' associations, faith-based organizations, labour unions, co-operatives, professional associations, chambers of commerce, independent research institutes and the not-for-profit media. (OECD, 2011, p. 10)

In Palestine case, [Jad \(2007, 2018\)](#) argues that:

the rise of NGOs can be seen to have resulted in a shift in power relations from power to women at the grassroots to power over them by the new elite.

This type of NGOs generated conflicts with forms of mass-based organisations over legitimacy, resources and space in public arenas. The NGOisation process in the post-Oslo process led a pressure on women's organisations to shift their role from mobilisation and liberation agenda to a 'state-building' and claiming rights, empowerment and equality as [Jad \(2018\)](#) argues. Is Women's CSOs activism, however, is considered a form of grassroots engagement and a process of 'participatory democracy'? Is active participation in local organisations, student unions, social movements, CSOs and NGOs a form of 'participatory democracy' in responding to the lack of a democratic process in a conflict zone? CSOs always seek to explore a new space for activists' social and political engagement by managing community development and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as improving humanitarian lives. The participatory practices have also expanded in a variety of unexpected public and private spaces. [Hilmer \(2010\)](#) and [Aragones and Sánchez-Pagés \(2009\)](#) discuss the definition and concept of participatory democracy where active citizens have the power to decide on change of their future. CSOs attempt to show the advantages of working for mutual benefit with tangible results between different groups to engage victimised in participating in social and political activities. The participatory process is also associated with the practice of a top-down mechanism conducted to include citizen's engagement and contribution to the public sector as [Bherer et al. \(2016\)](#) argue.

This book seeks to address the following questions: To what extent have the Palestinian CSOs in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank actually succeeded in empowering women's engagement in civil society participation despite the conflict, violence and occupation? What is the role of CSOs in engaging young

women and people in civil society activities? How did CSOs overcome cut of foreign aid challenges? To what extent do internationally sponsored CSOs succeed to promote women's engagement and development, enduring foreign occupation, foreign aid, political division and violence? It provides a specific study on CSOs' contributions to civic engagement, resilience and women's empowerment, despite foreign aid cut and the conflict, violence, instability in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The purpose of this book, in the field of development, peace studies, conflict resolution and conflict strategy, is to explore the learned lessons of resilience and civic engagement, despite the existence of social conservatism and political deadlock. It contributes to the field of development, civil society, the study of politics and international relations, as well as Middle East studies, and provides up-to-date analysis on young women's social and political challenges and lessons. It also examines the impact of the politics on local CSOs and the power and impact on social developments (2002–2020). This research considers the main thematic of CSOs' intervention, sponsored by international donors where the core approach is to study the active engagement of activists with emphasis on participatory process, the freedom of expression and community peacebuilding (Spurk, 2010, pp. 3–26). The study of the challenges facing women in civil society, peacebuilding and development, including active community participation under violence, occupation and the Palestinian division, is one aim of the book. It also examines the essential role and impact of CSOs upon peaceful struggle, community development relief assistance and human rights. These organisations always attempt to respond rapidly to the needs of the population by delivering social, health, cultural and educational services to all sectors of society during the different humanitarian circumstances as Natil (2014, 2019, 2020) discusses.

It gives an overview of recent foreign aid cut to Palestinian in general; however, there are still some international donors as European Union (EU) interested in supporting civil society activities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip despite 'the limits of securitized peace' between Israelis and Palestinians (Tartir, 2018). Jad (2007) argues that international NGOs, foreign states and donors hijacked the national agenda, after the second intifada, and concentrated on a particular set of issues concerning peace building, conflict resolution and related issues. Palestinians have been living in a very dramatic and violent political environment. The Palestinian Authority (PA) was dramatically weakened by Israeli activity, as well as by the deteriorating economic situation. The PA, however, has been unable to respond rapidly to the social and economic demands, and the needs of desperate residents of the OPT while economic empowerment by development aid remains a key

element for employment and financial, and significant impact on an individual's decision-making (Wildeman, 2019, pp. 153–174).

The foreign donors have always the power to 'promote' and 'exclude' their local civil society partners. Challand (2009) discusses the Palestinian civil society and their relationship with foreign donors. There have been, however, diverse set of CSOs working with international organisations and foreign donors to implement civil society activities. This has promoted the CSOs' dependency on international donors in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. These CSOs, however, have been challenged by violence, social context, foreign occupation and conditions, requirements, and shifts of international donors since 1967 (Hanafi & Cuhadar, 2010, p. 211). Foreign aid remains, however, a necessity for effective community programme delivery (Baliamouné Lutz, 2016, pp. 320–341). The example of CSOs' projects funded by EU programmes in OPT is used to clarify this linkage and discussed in Chapter 5. Dalia Hatuqa, however, discusses why some Palestinians are shunning foreign aid. There have been a number of critics and activists who argue that depending on international aid is unsustainable after shifting policies of USAID in 2019 as Besan Abu Joudeh, CEO and co-founder of BuildPalestine, says:

After USAID left, many organisations had to shut down. Our local non-profits should be sustainable, such that the changing political interests or international donors won't cause them to close up shop. (Hatoqua, 2019)

The critical framework also goes beyond this approach to draw upon the theory of 'participatory democracy' to examine the impact of CSOs' programmes. Bherer et al. (2016) argues that participatory democracy originally involves transformation of the inegalitarian relationships between the state and society. This can be helped to empower citizens in every sphere of their daily lives as work, political institutions, school, university and family. Michels and De Graaf (2010) discuss that the citizen's involvement has a number of positive effects as inclusion, civic skills and virtues, deliberation, and legitimacy. This is a natural process of identification of promising and citizens, who help in empowering networks and cooperation between CSOs working for active participation and engagement in civic actions. The conceptual framework used in this study comes from the notion of building a participatory civil society despite the challenges of violence and shifts of international aid. Theme and theory of 'participatory democracy' is reflected by CSOs' deliveries and intervention to promote a society's values of respect for a change process. Also considered is the existing literature's emphasis on a narrow definition of civil society and citizens' active participation in some

countries, where conflicts shape the social and political context as Paffenholz (2010) discusses civil society and peacebuilding. CSOs' engagement and deliveries sponsored that includes the voices of the most vulnerable are heard in the decision-making process, as an ideal concept of active community participation as Natil (2017, 2019, 2020) discuss.

CSOs' intervention is a participatory process reflected by different mechanisms and processes, for example, through NGOs, universities, public institutions, local councils, political parties and the decision-making process (Hanafi & Cuhadar, 2010, p. 207). CSOs may consider the methodology of active participation that entails understanding the beneficiaries' needs by being on the ground and introducing change incrementally. CSOs' endeavour to make training and campaigning activities is as creative as possible to enhance activists' engagement in community participation actions. This is a framework that has at its core the principles of participatory democracy, when some CSOs ensure that the implementation of activities remains inclusive and as broad-based as possible (Spurk, 2010, pp. 3–26). Francesca Polletta (2016) discusses the participatory enthusiasms of citizen's engagement and the impetus to citizen's engagement. Some CSOs encourage citizen's input at the various phases of implementation of community projects. Aisha Mansour, the leader of Dalia organisation in the West Bank, says:

We work on mobilising local resources for community-controlled development; meaning the community votes for the initiatives they want, what solutions they want to see in that community, and where the small grants that we give should go. (Hatoqua, 2019)

This significant contribution of CSOs is reflected in their capacity to engage in development and change process, and to contribute to long-term changes in attitudes and prejudices and to promote the rights of vulnerable groups while fostering tolerance by applying lessons learnt from other conflicts in the world (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2010, pp. 66–75). Civil society activists are increasingly witness to poor public freedom, socio-political deadlock, narrow civic space owing to controlled political systems and harsh economic life (Natil, 2020). One of the main objectives of CSOs' scope is to stimulate a national debate between local activists and decision-makers to ensure social and economic priorities are met, based on a broad consensus of society (Hanafi & Cuhadar, 2010, p. 211). CSOs also aim at increasing engagement of marginalised and vulnerable groups in implementation of activities as public dialogue and community peacebuilding (Natil, 2014, pp. 82–87).

CSO activists and/or ordinary citizen's attempt to challenge ineffective, inefficient and insufficient public policies while they still have some influence over

processes of change (Paffenholz, 2010). These CSOs have designed actions with the intention of empowering women's equal political participation, of stopping restrictions on public freedom and of protecting women from both political exclusion and domestic violence. Young women's integration into all parts of the participatory process, therefore, is very important, including the reconstruction and rebuilding process following conflict (Potter, 2008, pp. 142–143). Some CSOs identify a list of potential risks including the stances of radical groups for active community participation, which might physically threaten the leaders of civil society actions. CSOs also experience socio-political developments including any threat to civil society from state, grassroots and/or factional actors. The existing political conditions, social barriers and the financial challenges might encounter the actions' implementation (Natil, 2019, 2020). It is important to mention here the history and scope of CSOs since their emergence and their strenuous efforts, CSOs have still drawn criticism from local groups in the OPT, which claim that the programme ignores Palestinian suffering. However, despite these challenges, some local CSOs have sought to implement informal grassroots activities of education including training and awareness of good governance, human rights community peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Hanafi & Çuhadar, 2010, p. 207).

This includes advocating, implementing and enforcing policies and practices to stop this sort of exclusion and marginalisation. CSOs have sought to undertake a series of actions to establish viable grassroots engagement, which reaches local people, enabling marginalised groups to gain a voice. CSOs also attempt to empower civic engagement so that they gain a voice and participate actively in proposing and implementing public policies agenda. Their various missions have emphasised the priorities of civic rights and public freedom (Paffenholz, 2010). Internationally sponsored CSOs, however, deliver to contribute to enhance engagement of the marginalised groups to gain a voice and participate actively in proposing and implementing the public policy agenda (Wildeman, 2018).

Many CSOs' activities aim at rebuilding mutual trust through building capacity, empowering marginalised groups and launching joint development policies and strategies (Paffenholz, 2010). However, CSOs aim at activating grassroots networks to both assist and encourage various groups to support the endeavours of community participation. This also aims at promoting local networks to stimulate a national debate between activists and decision-makers, focussing on the themes of active participation and civic engagement. These activities may also address the internal divisions between the Palestinian factions, rebuilding mutual trust through increasing capacity for conflict

resistance and empowering marginalised young people, as well as launching joint development policies and strategies (Natil, 2019, pp. 24–36). This educates and enhances the capacities of target groups in implementing programmes in various fields including human rights, peacebuilding and good governance. It also includes raising awareness on rights of social and political participation empowerment (Paffenholz, 2010).

Many CSOs have also used creative and innovative operational techniques while responding to the shifting political landscape including the usual crises facing Palestinians (2000–2020). They have been responsive to the changes taking place and, therefore, have been able to adapt themselves to the requirements of new activities during the rise of political and domestic violence in the OPT (Natil, 2019, pp. 24–36). However, this book will present an exclusive and insightful text to explore civil society activists' contribution to community peacebuilding and modes of non-violence, as well as the history and present challenges in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as it is discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. It provides various examples of peaceful activists' empowerment from different locations in the OPT. But *the Gaza* crisis, exception, refugees, open-air prison, resistance, occupation, siege, trauma and persistence have huge influences over ordinary citizen's civic engagement (Tawil-Souri & Matar, 2016).

In addition, this book provides important details of various cases but presents the stories of activists' resilience and active engagement as well, that is, from those who seek to change the social and political circumstances despite an unstable political environment. It focuses on a new approach and the different themes of civil society empowerment, active engagement, participation and leadership from a theories' and practices' perspective, despite the fact of international fund shifts and escalating level of violence, poverty and isolation (Spurk, 2010, pp. 3–26). It also investigates the shifting political landscape after Hamas' victory in the Palestinian elections, and the subsequent military confrontation and political division between the Palestinians on the streets of Gaza, which left a huge challenge for civil society operations, particularly from 2006 to 2020. CSOs have employed a new policy of self-accommodation after Gaza's breakaway from the West Bank (2007–2020). Finally, CSOs faced new challenges following the division, the siege on the Gaza Strip and USA cut aid to CSOs and United Nations Relief and Working Agency (UNRWA) (Natil, 2019, 2020; Wildeman, 2019; Zanotti, 2018). This caused enormous destruction affecting citizens, the environment and the future of people's civic engagement and participation.

To identify the various objectives of active community participation and civic engagement activities, it was important to research and examine main tools of intervention used by CSOs. Part of network, CSOs use exchange

and reporting of human rights violations to strengthen good relationships with international organisations and donors as Islad [Jad \(2007, 2018\)](#) argues. CSOs cooperate with their international networks to secure funding for future activities and to make the CSOs an integral part of their own activities. This relationship, however, does not guarantee the CSOs grants and donations without proposing a quality and well-structured project relevant to donors' scope of work, intervention, conditions and values ([Murad, 2015](#)). This shift of the CSOs' political and national agenda and operations has weakened the intervention of CSOs ([Natil, 2016a, 2019, 2020](#)). These circumstances aggravated the work of CSOs, notably their policies, operations and practices, while the international funding like USAID has completely stopped ([Zanotti, 2018](#)).

Intervention is based on existing networks or building new coalitions, which include grassroots organisations, both active and working on civic engagement and active community participation in the OPT. CSOs also employ partnerships to promote the local ownership of activities on the ground and to introduce change ([Natil, 2016a, 2019, 2020](#)). CSOs' activity is used to facilitate the engagement of participants in a discussion on how they can best apply their skills. Participants also engage in discussion groups to identify how best to work together to improve the social situation in their locations. The guiding principles of the intervention of CSOs working for grassroots rely on networking, cooperation and coordination as a major method of programme implementation ([Paffenholz, 2010](#)). The use of networks is to ensure implementation of effective methodologies to interact with participants and to encourage them to share their thoughts and engage in role-play and simulations based on real-life experiences ([Natil, 2016a, 2019, 2020](#)).

This book also examines whether CSOs working to increase women's empowerment civic engagement and participation via coordination and cooperation among the partners during the implementation of activities. The scope of the study, therefore, seeks to identify whether young women's civic engagement conducted by CSOs in particular strengthen cooperation, communication and cross fertilisation between the CSOs' groups. Some CSOs aim at empowering women's groups by raising the level of their awareness about their legal rights as well as those relating to the social, economic and political situations, raising their organisational capacities ([Hanafi & Çuhadar, 2010](#), p. 207; [Jad, 2018](#); [Natil, 2014, 2016a, 2019, 2020](#)). The book is divided into eight chapters. The author introduces the definition of civil society, conflict and women's empowerment in Chapter 1. This chapter includes the background, framework, scope and questions of study and methods. It introduces explorations of CSOs' contribution to women empowerment and resilience in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. It focuses on three issues, conflict, civil

society and empowering women, by examining CSOs' contributions, aims at improving our understanding of these issues within the Palestinian context. Chapter 2 presents an historical overview of the socio-economic and political history of women and their local organisations, so that the reader can understand the historical context of women's social and political empowerment and challenges. It reviews the history of women's civic engagement, resilience and development organisations (1967–2020).

This includes examining the efforts and endeavours of leadership of local organisations made to achieve the various objectives of empowerment and change activities (Chapter 3). This chapter discusses the role of local leadership of CSOs in active engagement in national and local elections, and politics at large. It also examines the relationship between women's leadership, the local councils and civil society as a case study. It discusses if women have taken a part in participatory community engagement. This includes examination of the activities and analysing the efforts and endeavours made by local organisations to achieve the various objectives of women's empowerment by organising capacity building training activities, community monitoring and advocacy, research and field studies, awareness, and media releases. It discusses the lived experiences of grassroots activists/peacebuilders and how they contribute to promoting and increasing young women contributions to the decision-making process and increasing their power to decide on changes to their own future, which [Hilmer \(2010\)](#) and [Aragones and Sánchez-Pagés \(2009\)](#) define as 'participatory democracy'.

This process of engagement, however, is challenged by domestic and political violence against women. The author analyses this as a major challenge for civic engagement, social and empowerment in a participatory process in Chapter 4. This chapter considers, however, the case of women in CSOs to eliminate the phenomena of domestic violence. This includes the role of local and international organisations in launching initiatives to educate different spectrums of society, in order to shed light on this serious problem. These initiatives, however, have been challenged by increasing domestic violence, social and economic pressure, and ongoing Israeli Palestinian conflict. However, Chapter 5 studies critically the foreign aid and EU's civic women's empowerment-sponsored programmes in the OPT in particular. Women's empowerment has been an important topic for international organisations for several years ([Lutz, 2016](#)). Have the EU-funded programmes succeeded in empowering civil society in the OPT? This examines the role of local Palestinian CSOs and their cooperation with the EU's institutions and instruments by implementing various actions supporting women's social empowerment.

Women's active, profound contribution and multifaceted engagement have been largely invisible in peace process even after United Nation Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 'usually are informal, and hoc and rarely part of formal peace process, so their stories often drift and unacknowledged' (Porter, 2007, p. 1). The role of several women leaders in resolving family and local community disputes is discussed in Chapter 6. They have attempted to play a significant role in contributing to efforts to end the Palestinian division between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Jad (2018), however, argues that women's engagement is largely depoliticised, but women's distinguished role in non-violent and popular resistance groups in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is discussed in Chapter 7. This chapter examines young women leaders' engagement in non-violent resistance despite social conservatism, and foreign occupation and political division. Qumsiyeh (2011) discusses the popular resistance between history of hope and empowerment. This chapter also documents the story of some activists who engaged in leading the non-violent campaigns. Women's empowerment, however, can be understood through the lens of security, transformative change and participation (Porter, 2013).

Their active representation can be seen as an outcome of empowerment according to the cultural context of their society (Natil, 2016b). The central argument in the investigation of this book's questions is contrary to wide stereotype that CSOs in conflict zones have no capacities to contribute to their communities and become engaged in the development of their societies or support active engagement enduring violence. Chapter 8 summarises the main key points concluding civil society, women's resilience and empowerment. This argument what may have been overlooked by the large body of literature written on civil society, conflict, foreign aid and community peacebuilding.

The researcher uses a number of tools to collect data and enrich his arguments. He interviewed a number of women civil society activists and reviewed the existed literature and used his participatory observation to enrich the debate as well. He examines documentation and sharing of women's stories to show how they may contribute for civil society and empowerment, change process, peacemaking and community peacebuilding at their own communities despite challenges, shifts and barriers.

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HISTORY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS: ACTIVISM, INTERVENTION AND SHIFTS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses Palestinian civil society organisation (CSOs) and their historical perspective, notably their resilience, activism, participatory engagement, and community peacebuilding policies and practices. Some scholars, activists and leaders, however, prefer to use the term ‘CSOs’ not non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the post-NGOisation process. It examines social, economic and political factors, circumstances and notable changes that have influenced CSOs’ responses to changing circumstances in the region and their impact on active engagement and community peacebuilding. It also discusses how CSOs participate in shaping the social power structure. It also examines the established interests, reactions and responses of CSOs in light of societal needs stemming from multiple consecutive crises in the region. Indeed, there are many financial and technical barriers and challenges facing CSOs in the recent political environment ([Jad, 2007, 2018](#); [Natil, 2014, 2020a](#)).

It also provides insight into their self-adaptation policy after the Israeli occupation in 1967, establishment of Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994 and Gaza’s breakaway from the West Bank in 2007–2020 and their impact on active participatory engagement and community peacebuilding. It provides examples of established interests, reactions and responses of those philanthropic, voluntary CSOs and the needs of society created by subsequent crises in the occupied territories. It includes how these CSOs contributed to the establishment of new societal structures. Islad [Jad \(2007, 2018\)](#), however, argues that new CSOs, emerged post Oslo process, are depoliticised and less capable of mobilising constituency. It discusses the essential role and impact

of CSOs upon the peaceful national struggle, community development, relief assistance and documentation of human rights violation by different authorities. This includes their intervention and accommodation during the humanitarian crises (Natil, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2020).

As well as focussing upon the above, this chapter examines the contribution of women's CSOs in their efforts to make change a reality. More importantly, it considers the power and impact of the network of women CSOs, and their coordination and cooperation in undertaking actions and campaigns, in order to make change a reality in terms of politics and development. These were, however, very narrow and limited acts. CSOs attempted to contribute to the community efforts of influencing and solving the division between Hamas and Fatah, but the division has been stronger and more deeply rooted than their capacity at this stage.

To understand the intervention and contributions of CSOs to engagement of grassroots, resilience and activism, it is essential to introduce an historical overview of the socio-economic and political history of CSOs. In other words, the reader also can understand the political, social and financial shifts, owing to historical context of CSOs and their social and civic opportunities and challenges (1967–2020).

THE EMERGENCE OF CSOs

In early years of the twentieth century, *many Palestinian from wealthy families established different charitable organisations in order to support poor and vulnerable groups when* Palestinian society started forming 'not-for-profit' organisations or charities, later to be known as NGOs (Abu Nahla, 2008; Natil, 2014). These organisations also delivered services to the Arab Palestinian communities during the British mandate, before the 1948 establishment of Israel over historical Palestine (Gester, 2013). These organisations now include NGOs, charities, unions, research centres, universities as defined and adapted by OECD (2011). Palestinian non-profit organisations (CSOs) have been responsive and active actor in the different fields since the beginning of Palestine Cause (Hanafi & Cuhadar, 2010, p. 211). Nowadays, they operate under different umbrellas in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as follows.

Local Grassroots Centres: In 1949, the United Nations Relief and Working Agency (UNRWA) established youth and women's grassroots centres operating in 26 refugee camps in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. They aim at serving Palestinian young people refugees who were displaced after the Palestinian catastrophe and the establishment of Israel in 1948. These organisations deliver activities for young people in the different fields of culture, social

and sport activities, education, recreation and services. UNRWA has been providing technical and financial support for these centres since they were first established (Natil, 2017). This support has been essential for delivery and sustainability, despite a continuous reduction of assistance. One example is that UNRWA established 10 women's grassroots centres and eight youth activity centres operating in refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, serving refugees that offer spaces to attend seminars, training courses and social orientation but not sport facilities. These organisations deliver cultural, social and sporting activities, education, recreation and other services for women. Shinaz Mislh, the Director of the Maghazi Women's Centre says:

women practice their own community activities freely without any restrictions in a secured centre. (Mislh, 2016)

However, some members of these youth and women centres are actively engaged at their locations and support their peaceful and civic activities such as annual conferences, local and legislative elections if taken place.

CSOs affiliated indirectly to Political Factions or Parties: Most political groups have grassroots association. They are active in different scopes of community awareness and societal mobilisation (Gerster, 2013; Natil, 2017). They work with many issues, including women's political participation, legal aid, psychosocial support and women's self-sufficiency. Their work is based on the view of national liberation, active participation and women's empowerment within the political group. One political group set up various community committees to support women, youth and children during the first uprising (Gerster, 2013). However, Hamas was much more able to provide responsive social welfare, since it had an established social infrastructure, which it had inherited from the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) (Tamimi, 2007, pp. 52–55). The MB legacy meant that Hamas' social welfare work, based on its Islamic ideology and social change theory, was years ahead of the social work of the various Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) factions. Hamas paid special attention to women's engagement based on its own Islamic ideology and on political trends. Hamas ran, for example, a special committee within the movement to organise and coordinate with female groups as well. One of the main local Islamic organisations in this field was the Women's Young Islamic Association (WYIA). By 2004, the WYIA had 11 branches and 102 employees to run five kindergartens across the Gaza Strip (Darwish, 2002, pp. 46–68). Liberal feminist NGOs were undermined by NGOisation process, leaving a vacuum filled by Islamist feminist organisations as Jad (2007) discusses.

The Islamic organisations, for example, functioned as a social network of schools, sport clubs, kindergartens, women's centres and medical centres

serving grassroots Palestinians. This social welfare work was delivered based on the Islamic social change theory of building community bases before bringing about political change (Natil, 2015). It also sought to mobilise communities by spreading Islamic values through its own good example of providing social and community services. This theory was inherited from its mother organisation, the Muslim Brotherhood society, rooted in Islamic culture, beliefs, ideology and practices. These organisations also presented a challenge to the political hegemony of the PLO (Roy, 2011, pp. 70–75).

With such an infrastructure, Hamas was able to provide opportunities for women within their homes, as well as opportunities for them to participate in political and social life by engaging in a range of community activities designed by Hamas' social leaders. These organisations enabled women to engage within a safe environment controlled by Hamas' political and religious values. Women's organisations were also provided with counselling and training on techniques of better household management, such as cost-effective food preparation and basic home maintenance (Natil, 2015). Women's activities were always run by females in accordance with Islamic beliefs and cultural discipline. Women sent their children to nurseries and kindergartens run by the Al Salah Islamic Association, the Islamic Compound, Islamic Foundation or the WYIA to be educated about the guidance of Islamic teachings based on the Q'uran and Sauna (Darwish, 2002, pp. 46–68).

The capacity of these networks to deliver basic services quickly increased Hamas' image and gave it credibility among Palestinians before the elections 2006. Hamas' women's network also participated actively in the local elections after years of appointed committees in 2004 and December 2005. Two women were elected for every local council in the occupied territories. Its services were perceived to be of a higher quality than those operated by the PA. The response of these social networks promoted Hamas' image and credibility against the legitimacy of the PA led by the Fatah movement (Roy, 2007, p. 181).

Independent CSOs: Palestinian women grassroots organisations have been always involved in the liberation movement, but they have increasingly involved in new CSOs, established after Oslo agreement (Gester, 2013; Jad, 2007; Natil, 2017). In 1994, Palestinian local grassroots organisations were confronted with a new political and social environment, as the PLO established the PA. New CSOs' elites conflicted the old 'elites' of women's organisations over civic space, legitimacy and resource (Jad, 2007). The PA assumed the responsibility for administering civil and security affairs of the Palestinian Occupied Territories (OPT) in accordance with the Oslo agreement. The agreement was formed in order to start a new era of 'peace process' in the Middle East and to bring back the exiled revolutionary Palestinian political

system to the OPT to administer security and civil affairs for the Palestinian population before enduring decades of violence at all levels of society when the PLO signed an agreement with Israel on 13 September 1993, entitled ‘Oslo’, to establish a Palestinian self-ruling administration in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Jad, 2007, 2018; Natil, 2014, 2015).

New CSOs still represent some elite women of society and lack the adequate capacity to make a real change as Islah Jad (2018) argues. These organisations reflect and represent diverse spectrums of politics, culture and social structure, and groups. They are fewer than 100 from more than 1,400 registered civil society groups. They also lack the ability to become involved actively in decision-making process including political struggle owing to social, economic and political challenges and shifts (Natil, 2014, 2017, 2020a).

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE SHIFTS

On 7 June 1967, Palestinian civil society had been challenged by the Israeli occupation. Israel occupied the remaining 22% of historical Palestine, areas known today as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which includes Jerusalem. This made them to accommodate a new environment of operation under occupation (Natil, 2014, pp. 82–87). Although the Israeli military administration exercised military control over the population, it allowed Palestinians to exercise their religious rights. Some national leaders used peaceful mechanisms of engaging in community work and establishing local CSOs to reject the Israeli occupation policy of administering their affairs. In 1969, Dr Haidar Abdel-Shafi, a prominent national leftist figure affiliated with the PLO, established the first CSOs in the territory of Gaza. The Palestinian Red Crescent for the Gaza Strip was very active in the Gaza Strip, promoting the Palestinian national agenda through the provision of social and health services (Natil, 2014, pp. 82–87).

PLO also supported CSOs aimed at women’s liberation and participation in the civic and resistance activities against occupation (Jad, 2007). It was also opposed to the social agenda of Islamic CSOs led by the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip in the early 1980s. The Islamic CSOs led by Ahmed Yassin, who later became leader of the Islamic Hamas Movement, also established a society in very critical circumstances. These actions not only amplified the significance of CSOs’ work but also expanded their opportunities to educate diverse populations about their social and political beliefs, values and norms. This was as much about their peaceful resistance to and their social and political ideology towards defeating the occupier and oppressor as it was about

their cultural survival. There was a direct and organic link between CSOs' social actions aimed at achieving Palestinian ideological goals and practice of social and charitable giving (Natil, 2015).

Thus, Palestinian CSOs delivered services to ordinary citizens, thereby providing an alternative to the Israeli system of services. They delivered diverse social, educational, sport and financial services in response to the growing needs of Palestinian society under Israeli occupation. During this period, the Palestinian national movement had grown, leading to the first intifada (uprising), which began on the eve of 8 December 1987 (Rigby, 1991). Palestinian human security and public health deteriorated significantly with the outbreak of the intifada. This was due largely to the high number of conflict-related injuries and the very low capacity of public hospitals run by the Israeli military administration. This encouraged a number of Palestinian CSOs, like the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, to respond. They operated three mobile medical teams in the Gaza Strip with a number of permanent emergency first aid centres in the densely populated areas of Gaza where clashes with the Israeli military were almost daily occurrences (Rigby, 1991, p. 89).

The PA, however, still functions under Israeli sovereignty. Israel is solely responsible, as the occupying power, for movement in the OPT, even after the United Nations General Assembly recognised Palestine as a non-member state on 29 November 2012. Existing CSOs had to change their policies to cooperate with the PA, which inherited the delivery of social, educational and health services from the Israeli civil administration. Unexpectedly, the number of registered CSOs increased dramatically when now had an official, dedicated funding stream allocated funds by the international donors – to support the peace process and state building after the Oslo agreement. The allocated funds to CSOs, however, dropped drastically after the establishment of the PA (Natil, 2014, pp. 82–87).

Despite the drop-in funding allocation, CSOs found in this new political and financial shift an opportunity to contribute to social change processes in the OPT. In contrast, Palestinian CSOs continued operating in different fields of democracy, human rights, conflict resolution, community peacebuilding development, women's empowerment, youth civic engagement and psychological support and counselling, among others despite the fact of escalating violence from time to time.

THE SECOND INTIFADA, CSOs AND GAZA NEW STRUCTURE

In July 2000, the PA established a 'Ministry of NGOs', the year in which the 'peace process' between PLO and Israel collapsed. In October 2000, however,

the Palestinians and the international community witnessed the collapse of this new political environment between the PLO-Israel, after the failure of the Camp David negotiations over the issues of Jerusalem; borders and the return of refugees. The PA established a 'Ministry of NGOs' to respond to the rapid growth and expansion of CSOs' sector after the Oslo agreement. The relationship between the PA and the CSOs was mainly characterised by uncertainty about the role of NGOs in the new political environment and structure. The Ministry, however, was dissolved in 2005, having failed to deliver any documented achievements (Natil, 2014, pp. 82–87). CSOs' responses to the humanitarian crisis were much more rapid during the second intifada (2000–2004) than the first. During this period, CSOs were able to respond to international donors' bids and make use of funds allocated to support Palestinian society. These donors still held out hope for a peace process, supported the PA and sought to favour conditions for future negotiations between Israel and the PLO as Tartir (2018) discusses 'the limits of securitized Peace'.

The second intifada, however, created new conditions and opportunities for civil society on the ground. In particular, Islamic CSOs took advantage of these changes to promote themselves as part of an alternative to the PA. This also increased the political credibility and weight of *Hamas*, contributing significantly to *Hamas' victory in the elections before its military takeover of the Gaza Strip during June 2007*. On 14 June 2007, Palestinian CSOs faced a new challenge that badly affected their operations and policies. Hamas used military action against the PA security forces intent on controlling the administration of the Gaza Strip security. Until then, the PA security forces were managed and controlled entirely by Fatah. Hamas military forces defeated and then expelled PA forces, leaving Hamas in full control of the Gaza Strip. This clash resulted in 161 casualties (45 civilian, 91 Fatah and 27 Hamas) according to the Gaza-based Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (Natil, 2015, p. 116).

This shook up Palestinian society at large and also impacted upon the working environment of CSOs. The PA closed most CSOs affiliated with Hamas in the West Bank. Conversely, in Gaza, Hamas closed down most CSOs associated with the Fatah movement. This hostile environment affected the relationship between CSOs and the local authorities, notably with respect to human rights violations. CSOs in the Gaza Strip lived in a state of mistrust and confusion as they started to face new procedures from a Hamas government run by officers with little to no governance experience, as Amjad Shawa, Director of the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organisations Network in Gaza, said:

Introducing illegal amendments to the executive regulations of the Law of Associations No. 1 of 2000, giving the Interior Ministry more powers and allowing it to interfere in the affairs of associations, taking advantage of the gaps left by the former legislative council in the law which allows for multiple interpretations. (Balousha, 2013)

Despite the critique, Hamas government's officials have maintained that the 860 registered CSOs working in the Gaza Strip have freedom of operations (Balousha, 2013). This new environment of Hamas' governance allowed Islamic CSOs to increase their cooperation with international Islamic CSOs in support of Hamas' governance. Notably, they organised humanitarian initiatives in the Gaza Strip after the Israeli military's 'Operation Cast Lead' from 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009. The Israeli operation left more than 1,300 people dead; over 5,000 people wounded; many people displaced; some people trapped in their homes; and some 2,400 buildings destroyed. Gaza's civilians faced dire shortages of food, water; cooking gas; fuel and medical care due to resultant insecurities; the enforced closure of all of Gaza's borders and alleged serious violations of international humanitarian law. Electricity was limited and in some places sewage was spilling into the streets (Levy, 2010, p. 9).

Many international organisations, however, responded to new Gaza crisis in 2009 by delivering assistance and funds to local CSOs. In March 2009, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Fund for International Development, for instance, funded 50 active CSOs including from different sectors to deliver services that included psychological support, documentation of human rights violations, food and clothing to women and children (Natil, 2014, pp. 82–87). This was overly challenged, once again, by the longest and devastating cycle of fighting of the last eight years between the Islamist groups of Hamas and Islamic Jihad and Israel that lasted for 51 days during the summer of 2014. This created a new environment of destruction, overloaded with psychological problems that left over 2,100 dead and 100,000 Gazans homeless. The majority of those killed were Palestinian women and children. Only 76 Israeli soldiers were killed in the fighting. Thousands of women left without shelter for many months, waited for months to rebuild their houses that demolished during the war (Natil, 2014, pp. 82–87). As Mohammed Srour (2017), a field researcher at a human rights organisation in Gaza says:

The Palestinian people now busy with their own daily affairs, living without electricity and facing the entire closure on the strip and the invasion of pollution of their environment and beaches, owing to

the lack of electricity. The citizens have no place to go in Gaza to escape the heat of the summer because of the lack of electricity. The sewage flows into the sea as the pumps and wasting stations do not work without electricity. The beaches are fully polluted and people cannot enjoy swimming in the sea to escape from the extreme heat any more in most coastal areas.

This environment of destruction had placed the operations of CSOs in an even worse situation in their efforts to meet the high demands and needs of citizens in a very transparent and efficient way, especially given the lack of resources in a tiny and closed coastal strip. This increased pressure on some CSOs to deliver services to all categories and sectors when Trump administration had terminated United States Agency for International Development (USAID) operations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and frozen all financial assistance to all Palestinian sectors including health, CSOs and UNRWA in 2017. UNRWA, however, has been dealing with the most severe financial crisis since its establishment after the Trump administration withdrew its contributions to UNRWA which amounted to \$359.3 million in 2017. This included \$231.5 million of 2017 bilateral economic assistance that was originally intended for the West Bank and Gaza, including \$25 million for East Jerusalem hospitals. USAID also ended its assistance to the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Zanotti, 2018).

This funding cut has had a very serious impact on UNRWA and the local Palestinian CSOs. This cut has increased challenges of CSOs to respond to new massive challenges as they struggle to meet citizens' needs and demands efficiently, not least because resources are sorely lacking after years of blockades in the Gaza Strip (Srouf, 2018). As Al Samak (2018) suggests:

[The] aid cut will increase citizens' suffering and the pressures on the PA, and UNRWA, but the solidarity among various categories of the society may ease pressures for political causes and this may encourage the international community to get engaged once again.

These insecure circumstances are reflected in all spheres of life. They resulted in critical social and deteriorating human security circumstances, which swept across the Gaza Strip, in addition to traditional and cultural restrictions, and the stereotyping of women. These circumstances and constraints have already placed women in a worse situation. There is also a need to undertake a series of actions to establish viable grassroots engagement, to reach local people and to enable marginalised groups of society to find their voice.

VALUES OF CSOs' INTERVENTION AND ACTIVISM

Despite the challenges mentioned above, CSOs still provide a safe environment and platform for young people to engage freely and actively in key participatory grassroots activities. They still operate to serve and develop their civil society by engaging all citizens, and in particular, young people of society in a participatory process of decision-making. [Ank Michels and Laurens De Graaf \(2010\)](#) argue that participatory projects are aimed at giving citizens influence. CSOs and women's organisations in particular struggle to combat increasing levels of violence, poverty, inheritance deprivation and female unemployment. These organisations, however, face societal constraints, as society generally prefers men in decision-making positions or in the public and private spheres. Society discriminates against women culturally in different fields both de jure and de facto ([Natil, 2014, 2019, 2020c](#)). These circumstances and violence have also imposed huge challenges and restrictions on women's CSOs in their ability to improve women's active participation and community participation, despite the implementation of hundreds of women's empowerment programmes in the Gaza Strip. Fida Amer, Deputy Director at the Society Voice Foundation-SVF, says:

These organizations face huge demands from women to participate in various activities such as awareness, training, internship, jobs – this is poor English and needs to be changed), counselling, advocacy, voluntary positions, media and freedom of expression. These activities aim at eliminating the technical and cultural obstacles of violence, inheritance deprivation, discrimination and unemployment against women. (Amer, 2014)

[Ank Michels and Laurens De Graaf \(2010\)](#) argue that 'citizen participation serves an instrumental rather than an expressive purpose; in practice, participation is not regarded as a value in itself'. To develop young women's active participatory engagement, there have been a number of professional CSOs cooperate with grassroots organisations to run various community participation and peacebuilding programmes. Participants' attitudes were mostly committed to the promotion of values advocating community peacebuilding and respecting non-violence, other side and democratic values. The participant organisations were committed to being involved in supporting participatory, transparent and accountable governing institutions that required engaging young people and the government in order to ensure political, social and economic priorities, based on a broad consensus in society as [Ank Michels and Laurens De Graaf \(2010\)](#) argues that 'the development of civic skills, the increase of public engagement, and the opportunity to meet and discuss neighbourhood issues and problems'.

To strengthen its intervention, CSOs coordinated and cooperated with grassroots centres from different areas of the Palestinian territories, in order to train young people on practices of the principles and techniques of leadership, voluntary work, advocacy and implementation of community initiatives. Many CSOs also held a number of meetings and discussions with representatives of the target groups in order to design programmes of young people's engagement in community peace actions (Natil, 2014, 2019, 2020c). Young leaders also engaged in forming community forums to assist trainees put their newly acquired 'practice' skills into operation by organising community initiatives and activities. Ank Michels and Laurens De Graaf (2010) also discuss the importance of the networks of civic engagement to make citizens more qualified. Young women's representatives were selected, based on certain criteria, to ensure the success of the target groups in cooperation with local organisations as follows: interested in civic education, peace and social work; volunteers at their CBOs; willing to transfer knowledge; and should be under 35 years of age and committed to the values of the project. They support the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable, in order for them to be heard in the decision-making processes (Amer, 2014).

The shifting political landscape, violence and conflict have already affected and hindered women's social and political empowerment since 1967. However, women CSOs have already employed a number of accommodating policies and operations to increase their interventions and activism to promote the values of women's resilience and empowerment. Several young activists and journalists, for example, help to provide vital information regarding the forms of violence facing Palestinian women. Those women still fight to improve their position and to move from the margins of society to becoming key decision-makers in civil, political and community work. A number of active CSOs are enhancing young women's engagement and active participation through grassroots networks supporting their endeavours. This includes broadcasting and circulating materials and organising activities to foster a free press and civic engagement and participation in the public policies agenda. Their various missions aim for women's civic rights, public freedoms and contribution to society – despite living under occupation. Women's leaders also still attempt to challenge and change the circumstances and constraints that have already placed women in a worse situation (Natil, 2019, 2020b).

Karin A. Gester (2013), however, argues that these organisations are not a part of civil society system of checks and balance to the PA but rather stabilising its ruling system and these organisations are a part of neoliberal restructured working sector.

CONCLUSION

Palestinian CSOs including women's organisations have been very responsive and active contributors to relief, development and human rights since the beginning of the Palestine/Israel conflict despite the fact of NGOisation process taken place after Oslo agreement. They have done so despite social, cultural, economic and political challenges, and have assisted women in becoming much more resilient and defiant. They have a long history of organising themselves and leading women's activities to empower their participation in all fields. Palestinian CSOs have not only played an essential role in the peaceful national struggle against Israeli occupation, but they have also pursued women's social, political community development; delivered relief assistance; and provided monitoring and documentation of human rights violation by different authorities. CSOs were a means of developing civil society leadership that was free of Israeli military control. This was one way of resisting occupation. They have rapidly responded to the needs of populations by delivering services to all sectors of society during the different humanitarian crises.

CSOs' operations were always challenged by a number of internal and external circumstances and factors stemming from the Israeli occupation of the OPT, the failure of the peace process and the Palestinian factional divide. Local grassroots organisations, including the private sector in cooperation with the Palestinian government, have to build a national plan of engagement and empowerment of women and their leaders to campaign and influence the policy-makers. The national plan to encourage engaging civil society is to ensure that development priorities are based on a broad consensus in society. Marginalised and vulnerable young women still need to get engaged in a fully participatory process as an integral part of agenda for development, peace and democracy. A major methodology is to engage participants by planning, designing and implementing the women's national plan that rely mainly on participatory approach and process from down to up. It will start from local grassroots organisations to advocate the public on their needs in the policy-making process. Local women leaders, young graduates, other direct and indirect women and CSOs should be able to become involved in the implementation of the national plan.

CSOs use the tools of monitoring, evaluation and researching to explore certain information and assess the impact of their activities on target groups. The tools are used to study certain problems and explore the solutions. Some CSOs also use field monitoring to envision changes by active civic engagement and participation, premised on long-term involvement. Some CSOs, for example, monitor the services delivered by local organisations and seek to monitor

the services of local councils. Local activists monitored certain activities to ensure respect of human rights standards by state and non-state actors. Field surveys are used to share information with the public and enrich those civil society materials focussing on the values of active community participation and civic engagement. The results help to clarify whether the objectives of the activities have been fully met. The written evaluation also provides feedback on the activity's next steps and how participants envision the implementation of skills, the running of the action and campaigning activities.

CSOs also ensure that participants receive the required support that they need. Some CSOs, for example, also use evaluation tools to assess and support the impact of the sources of activities to verify the results. It always designs questionnaires so that they identify, to some extent, how much the participant in training has been affected by violence and social problems. This helps organisations identify the real needs of women participating and to what extent domestic violence has affected their awareness of the active participation and engagement theme's relevant issues. The outcome of this pre-test has helped enrich sources in this field, and future actions are built upon it. Some CSOs also employ an external evaluator to issue a report documenting all lessons learned, as well as recommendations and tangible achievements. The evaluators assess if these actions contribute to positive social change policies at all levels. The assessors, researchers and/or evaluators also attempt to assess if the CSOs' actions are relevant to the promotion of young people's engagement in local networks. They also assess if CSOs' actions stimulate a national debate between young people and decision-makers, focussing on the themes of active participation in decision-making process at all levels. This is used to ensure that CSOs achieve their objectives of keeping young women civic engagement, active community participation and leadership as their main target group activities.

In other words, CSOs design, broadcast and circulate materials, as well as organising activities to foster a free press in their efforts to eliminate the technical and cultural obstacles that women face in their contributions to public life. This activity is to allow discussion of certain concepts of civic engagement and community participation in decision-making process as a main theme to raise public awareness based on respect of marginalised groups' rights. Young women, for example, use the media to raise their rights and established networks of information. Social media networks are used for promotion and distribution of the concepts of active participation in decision-making process.

One example is the CSOs' use of a new approach of assisting activists to form community forums or platforms to increase their scope of intervention in community issues and problems. Trained young people have attempted

to put their newly acquired skills and knowledge of engagement into practice to advocate for active civic participation. One example is that CSOs implemented a 12-month project, which trained young leaders to practice their new skills through local forums, as well as by participating in social accountability activities. Young women leaders selected their representatives to lead community forums for social and political representation at the local level. They also assessed and monitored the performances of social services. They have been practically discriminated against by politicians with very narrow political interests, seeking to achieve success regardless of good governance practices, active grassroots engagement and community participation.

CSOs used a very close process with the community to assess the needs of young women and beneficiaries who participated actively in the planning of the programmes. For example, CSOs work closely on a regular basis with different young people's target groups in designing and implementing different projects. Some CSOs' team, for example, runs daily activities, such as workshops, public awareness sessions, town hall meetings, seminars, conferences, interviews and field visits at a variety of locations. These activities have made it possible for staff to remain very close to the needs, views and issues of young people. Staff always encourage beneficiaries and young people's groups under different civic engagement and community participation themes to assess their needs and issues to be tackled and addressed in the planning of future activities. Staff seek to strengthen mutual relationships with these different target groups, who often express their needs and views freely. This close relationship with young people provides staff with a remarkable knowledge and understanding of the different needs of target groups. These groups provide the staff with up-to-date information on the issues affecting young people, as well as their priorities and needs.

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3

LEADERSHIP OF CIVIL SOCIETY: CULTURE AND CONSTRAINTS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the active role of civil society organisations' (CSOs') local leadership of promotion grassroots' civic engagement and participatory approaches democracy (Aragones & Sánchez-Pagés, 2009; Hilmer, 2010). The contribution and role local leadership of CSOs, for example, in national and local elections, and politics at large is discussed. To what extent have 'new elites' of women's organisations contributed to new structure of civil society? The complications of the relationship between local leadership and 'elite' of the national movement, and its impact on grassroots participation in the processes of decision-making and the development of their society is discussed. Islah Jad (2007, 2018) discusses the relationship between the new elites and the earlier forms of mass-based organisations over public space, legitimacy and resources. New CSOs advocate governments to change the culture by endorsing and enacting Quotas to increase women's rights and political representation in local councils and parliament. It discusses this relationship between the 'elite' and grassroots women social movement, as well as the challenges facing women, which have already placed the vulnerable groups in a worse situation, remaining on the margins of society. Voting for this parties or that group without real political participation in a violent environment is a major challenge for civic engagement and active participation in development and change process.

CSOs across the world always play a very powerful role in raising awareness of citizens' active participation, as well as advocating women rights in all aspects of life. This chapter also examines to what extent CSOs, local leaders and organisations play a role in influencing the decision-making process, in

order to amend legislation in terms of increasing civic engagement as women's political participation by endorsing and enacting Quotas. Quotas are used as positive discrimination to promote women's political participation through elections in many countries across the world. Quotas are used by countries where women's political representation is very low, not only therefore by third world countries but also by Western democracies. Candidate gender quotas, for example, were passed into law by Dáil Éireann in the Republic of Ireland during July 2012 (Keenan & McElroy, 2016). The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), however, passed an electoral amendment to increase women's participation in 2005.

This chapter also includes restrictions of public freedoms, political exclusion and violence as part of cultural context domination facing civil, social and political engagement.

CULTURAL DOMINATION

Palestinian grassroots women are not different from those in the surrounding Arab countries; however, they remain different in their way of delivering and contributing to civil society at large and the Palestinian issue in particular as Jad (2018) discusses. R. C. Merrill (2017, p. 124) argues that the Arab societies, however, have common values of conservatism and religion remains an influential factor of both the culture and the behaviour. In many countries, religion is dominant, although some CSOs invited open-minded religious leaders to deliver statements and lectures to endorse their operations and values of women's active participation in community development and political structures (Merrill, 2017, p. 124). The culture of Palestinian society is highly politicised as people have been resisting foreign occupation and seeking statehood for a century now. There is, however, still a clear distinction between the culture of gender and politics when it comes to leadership, the structure of the governance and who should lead as Jad (2018) discusses.

Society is 'masculine' and the man should lead social and political affairs including CSOs despite the fact that women compose half of the population. However, Al Najjar (2012) argues that many women, however, work side by side with men in different fields and play an important role. Women represent a powerful segment of society and no one can ignore their role. There is no difference between men and women in all civil and political rights according to Article 9 of the Basic Law, 'the temporarily constitution' of the Palestinian Authority (PA). There is no difference between them on the basis of political views, disability, ethnicity, sex, colour and religion. However, PA cannot determine who is Palestinian and who is not under the Oslo agreement as Jad (2004) argues.

Their power of representing half of the society must be invested properly to enhance their place in community interdependence. Women have been undertaking an active role in this struggle ([Al Najjar, 2012](#)).

In January 1996, the PA, which was established in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1994, ran its first presidential and legislative elections. The Palestinians elected 88 deputies/representatives for the first Legislative Council and only five women were elected. Mrs Samiha Khalil, however, was the only candidate who ran for the presidential position and decided to challenge the legacy of the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. He led the National Liberation Movement of Fatah and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) for 40 years. Samiha Khalil was born in Anabta, Tulkarem, in the 1940s and she had a long experience of engaging and contributing to Palestinian civil society and the politics of the national movement ([American Friends Service Committee, 2010](#)). She has been a charity worker ever since and a member of the National Council in exile since 1965. She was considered from the 'old elite' of mass organisations from charitable societies and women's grassroots groups or charitable services as [Islah Jad \(2007\)](#) discussed. She served as President of the Women's Federation Society, the Union for Voluntary Women's societies and the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW). She was the Founder of In'ash al-Usra Society and was President from 1967. She passed away on 26 February 1999 ([American Friends Service Committee, 2010](#)).

The endeavour of Ms Samiha Khalil was a very courageous and distinguished step, but it was also an unprecedented for a woman to challenge Arafat. She was from the old elite from Women's activists who were heavily involved in the Palestinian national movement ([Jad, 2007](#)). During the elections campaigns, there had been various rumours that Arafat pushed Samiha Khalil to run for the election to say that he was unlike the other Arab countries who won by 99%. Arafat's charisma, symbolism, power and influence over Palestinian politics had been a crucial issue and a pivotal stone in leading the PLO towards statehood since the 1960s. The Palestinians believed that Arafat was the only person who could lead the complicated processes of institution building, politics and negotiations with the Israelis. They did not believe that a woman could do this. Samiha Khalil was the first woman in the Arab world to run for presidency, while many gulf kingdoms still did not allow women to vote or run for election during this period. Kuwait was considered an advanced state as it allowed women to vote and participate in the elections in 2005. However, Lebanon was the first Arab country to allow women to vote in 1952 ([Merrill, 2017](#), p. 124).

Samiha's contribution was so progressive; however, she represented the old form of 'women elites' and 'state-building' ([Jad, 2007](#)). She encouraged the overwhelming majority of women who represented half of society to vote

and participate actively in elections. The patriarchal structure of Palestinian society, however, respected the superiority of men as exceptional leaders in politics as [Jad \(2018\)](#) discussed. They were not used to seeing a woman in a leadership position, despite there have been a number of women who were involved in and contributed to the resistance, struggle and politics against occupation, for example, Hanan Ashrawi, former academic and negotiator and currently a member of executive committee of PLO. However, there had been no single woman leading a Palestinian faction and movement in contemporary history until 2010 when Zohira Kamal was elected to lead her small party 'Fida'. It sounds this party represents an 'elite group', close to the small circle of the decision-making in the PLO.

During this period, 'elite women' contributed through various platforms including media, political factions and movements, NGOs, universities and the private sector, but their influence was still very limited in the decision-making process as [Natil \(2020\)](#) discusses. However, little changes appeared on the surface when the number of women present in public office, CSOs, NGOs and the private sector increased after 1996. In 2005, it was estimated that women made up 42% of the NGOs administration in Palestine while, at the same time, they accounted for 45% in Lebanon ([Merrill, 2017](#), p. 125). Women are appointed to lead certain ministries such as women's affairs, health, children's care and family issues, but not to security, finance or justice, which are dominated by males. Women who have strong connections with the ruling elite or among the ruling body are appointed and employed to take part in 'window dressing'. These appointments promote the inequality gap and differences in the Arab world ([Merrill, 2017](#), p. 124).

There are no religious or legal obligations or binding that prevents women from taking up this role, but this post has been dominated by men because of the patriarchal society ([Al Najjar, 2012](#)). [Islah Jad \(2011\)](#) argues that religion does not prohibit women's political participation and their contribution to institutions and state-building. There have been, however, many qualified and professional women from different fields of engineering and law. For example, women represented 21.1% of registered engineers with the Union of Engineers while males represented 78.9%. Females made up 23.2% of the members of students' councils in West Bank universities compared to 76.8% of male members. However, employed women in the public services represented 42.6% of posts, compared to 57.4% males, and females represented 11.7% of the Directors General, compared to 88.3% of males in the same positions. In 2015, only 5.8% of ambassadors were female compared with 94.2% who were male ([Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics \(PCBS\), 2017](#)).

These public service appointments indicate that religion does not challenge women's participation in public life, but the domination of masculine culture remains a major obstacle for women's active grassroots engagement and public contribution to the development of their society at different levels. There have been a number of women, however, who have attempted to challenge the de facto domination by participating in politics and elections. The PA has been always criticised about the feminist groups of women movement because they are excluded from decision-making processes at different levels (Siam, 2016).

QUOTAS

Prior to the second legislative elections taking place in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), numerous CSOs, 'elite women's' organisations and some male human rights activists succeeded in campaigning, raising their voices and influencing the decision-makers to enact the Quotas law in the PLC and the local councils. CSOs were very active in the OPT despite the political situation there (Siam, 2016). Civil society succeeded in influencing the executive authority, including the President's office and the legislative council, regarding amendment of the basic law of the PA and enacting the Quotas law to increase the number of women elected to the local councils, as well as the legislative council. Article 4 (Women's Representation) of the basic law of 2005 states clearly that each electoral list nominated for the proportional elections (lists) shall include a minimum number of women.

1. The first three names in the list.
2. The next four names that follow.
3. Each five names that follow.

The Quotas allowed only 17 women out of 132 to enter the Legislative Councils in 2006 and two women for each local council in 2005. Many Arab countries, however, do not enforce Quotas and more than 80% of countries have more than 30% women elected under quotas (Palmieri, 2011, p. 26). However, women have already failed to increase their active participation or to amend the legislation, owing to inactive and ineffective Legislative Council after division between Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the PA in the West Bank (Jad, 2018). Quotas, however, contributed to increasing women's participation in the local councils and Legislative Council after elections took place in 2004. Quotas have also contributed to increased women's participation in the decision-making process of some political groups, factions, movements and

local councils since 2004 ([Abu Mashayekh, 2012](#); [Albelbeisi, 2012](#); [Za'neen, 2012](#)). Women are very active, resilient and able to accommodate, but their efforts and achievements are achieved as individuals, not based on collective work. In addition, there have been a number of women who were appointed to leading political positions, but this did not strengthen the Women's Movement in general because women do not trust each other ([Samak, 2016](#)).

Quotas gave women much more representation in contributing to decision-making in the political structure; however, this representation has not been used properly to increase women's effective participation, owing to the PLC which has been frozen and inactive since the Palestinian division between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 2007 as [Abu Mashayekh \(2012\)](#), [Albelbeisi \(2012\)](#) and [Za'neen \(2012\)](#) argue. In other words, the Palestinian political system is inactive, paralysed and negatively affects citizens and women as [Natil \(2020\)](#) discusses. In this situation, Quotas are a positive discrimination to increase women's participation, but they are not effective enough and women should get their rights by increasing their awareness in society to obtain their goals. Quotas did not change the political or social behaviour of many politicians and/or policy-makers as [Albelbeisi \(2012\)](#), a civil society activist and a journalist argues:

Women have the right to involve in political life and decision-making process but they still face a number of major obstacles including social traditions and customs despite their participations increased in the elections of 2006.

There has been, however, very little change in the official system to support women's leading positions in the governance structure. In 2009, the government appointed five women in ministerial positions for the first time in spite of introducing the Quotas in 2004. In 2004, the PA conducted the first round of local elections after years of appointed committees. In December 2005, the PA conducted the second round of elections in local and municipal councils throughout the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. At least two women were elected to every local council in the OPT. However, the problem is that there is still a huge gap between women and the local councils/municipalities. There were always a conflict and miscommunication between some women and the men mayors as the member of Maghazi Council Member, Mrs Hanan [Abu Mashayekh \(2012\)](#) discussed. [Za'neen \(2012\)](#), a former member of Beit Hanoun local council in the Gaza Strip also argues:

Women's representation came as a part of Quotas system imposed by the late Palestinian election law, but women still have no real power or voices within these councils. Some of these councils are

rural and traditionally controlled by families and dominant persons. women political participation is not only to participate and or vote in elections, but women should participate effectively in decision-making process of all institutions.

The law of Quotas, however, has increased women's social and political participation in the decision-making processes of political groups, factions, movements and local councils since 2004. Women have had a number of successful experiences in decision-making and have contributed to changes in some positions at local councils. [Siam \(2016\)](#) argues that the effect of these experiences, however, was limited as the women movement or local council lacks strategies to create a comprehensive change in the socio-culture of the society led by the Women's Movement. The Women's Movement, including all organisations and groups, already failed when they used the Quotas as a goal and not a tool to increase their participation and influence in the decision-making process ([Siam, 2016](#)).

The currently existing laws contributed to the current status of women, as there have been women who are deprived of their education, inheritance and guardianship both at work and with regard to their salaries. This has already affected their participation at all levels of public life ([Almour, 2016](#)). One of the main issues that affect women is the existing laws and legislation based on equal rights, as the current 'Panel Law' promotes violence against women and protects the criminal from punishment in issues of 'honour killing'. This law provides justification for the killer and protects them by easing their sentences. The Panel Law does not tackle the crimes of internet and sexual harassment. Women also suffer from the article of 'guardianship' of marital law, which is not a modern law and does not reflect women's progress and achievements made in the OPT. For example, a number of women, who occupy high-ranking positions and can deliver nationally and internationally, are still controlled by old laws and cannot make decisions about their personal issues such as marriage, divorce and so on ([Siam, 2016](#)).

Women still felt discriminated against in the workplace, and they were only used by the establishment to show that it was being 'gender friendly' even after introducing Quotas. The PCBS reported that 82.8% of judges were male, compared to 17.2% female, and 77.5% of registered lawyers were male, compared to 22.5% female. It also reported that 83.3% of the members of the public prosecution staff were male, compared to 16.7% female ([PCBS, 2017](#)). There have been, however, women appointed to high-ranking positions to lead public institutions and ministries that appear gender friendly. Governments want to show that they have a 'gender agenda', which is oriented towards promoting women's social and political participation as the

judicial system in the OPT, appointed the first female, Tahrir Hamad, as a Justice official, locally called 'mazouna', a Muslim official authorised to carry out both marriage and divorce according Islamic Sharia Law, in the West Bank city of Ramallah on 29 July 2015 (PCBS, 2017). Now, women comprise only 5% of Palestinian Central Council members, 11% of the Palestinian National Council, 14% of the Council of Ministers, one woman governor out of 16 (the governor of Ramallah and Al-Bireh), 44% of all employees in the public sector, 13% of women public sector employees hold the rank of Director General or higher (Care international, 2020). There has been, however, a gap between decision-makers, women's leaders, elite and grassroots and CSOs. Women movement and its current leadership face challenges and need support first from women themselves (Almour, 2016).

WHAT IS THE WOMEN SOCIAL MOVEMENT?

The Women's Movement is part of the national movement that includes all secular and liberal political groups and factions, and it is not independent (Siam, 2016). The National Movement lives in a deep crisis in its relationship with society at large because it has lost its popularity. Palestinian women, like youth, are represented by different local organisations, unions, political parties and social groups in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. They are not represented in one movement with a clear membership and formal hierarchy and leadership. There is more than one union and movement under different names and with different politically driven agendas. For example, the Palestinian Women's Union was an organisation created by many women political leaders in 1965 (Jad, 2007, 2018). Although it was banned by the Israeli authorities from 1966 to the mid-1990s, women's federations and charities created a network across the diaspora to participate in the Palestinian liberation effort and to represent women's interests in national and international forums. The women's organisations became very active before the first intifada in 1987 (Jad, 2011). Asad Abu Sharkh (2020) says:

All the Palestinian women organizations have strongly participated in and contributed to the very struggle for ending the Israeli occupation, from the very first day of occupation, they were part and parcel of the political echelon facing and fighting the Israeli occupation of Palestine . Some of these women played the lead roles in various resistance organizations and assumed executive posts in the internationally – recognized representative the PLO and the Palestinian national council.

These generations of women's leaders focussed on the national struggle and became a strong network of women that provided politically and socially for their communities in the diaspora. The women's organisations, however, were depoliticised after the first intifada and marginalised from the political arena. They found their self-satisfaction in their local communities by providing activities including consultancy on women's legal and social rights (James, 2013, pp. 18–22). The Women's Movement is represented by a spectrum of unions, leaders and NGOs, operating different programmes and actions of capacity building, awareness and advocacy campaigns to defend women's rights at all levels, attempting to participate in the development and decision-making processes. The Women's Movement is part and parcel of various political factions and groups who have been already been affected by political division. It is a part of ongoing conflict between Hamas and Fatah as Islah Jad (2011) discusses the struggle between the 'forces of darkness' and the 'modernising forces' has no empirical foundation.

Before the Oslo agreement in 1993, the Women's Movement aimed at the mobilisation of women at the grassroots level to get engaged in liberation activities and contribute to ending the Israeli occupation as Jad (2011) discussed. However, it has been much more fragmented, less focussed on national priorities and have become involved in the details of the daily needs of a few number of its 'elite or selected members' leading CSOs. Their focus is now to secure funding to keep the existence of organisations regardless of the priorities of women's issues (Siam, 2016). This shift of the women's political and national agenda and operations has weakened the Women's Movement, owing to a number of factors and reasons. I have summarised them as follows:

1. *Political Landscape:* The Women's Movement is fragmented and divided between the national movement led by PLO and Islamist groups led by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Islah Jad (2011) argues that CSOs' activism does not have an organised constituency, and their support is derived from a decaying de-legitimised authority, but the Islamists have developed a political organisation. This has already affected the Women's Movement because it is fragile and sensitive to social discrimination and political polarisation in society. Islah Jad (2007) discusses the progressive de-politicisation of the Women's Movement that NGOisation movement supported by international donors has created a vacuum that has been increasingly filled by Hamas. The division and ideologies have already influenced women's scope of work and activities since 1993 in particular; however, women's engagement and contribution to national work are much more polarised now. The National Women's Movement, for example, has attempted on numerous occasions to raise their voices

and call for the end of Palestinian division (a number of women's groups from the liberal and political affiliation to the PLO organised a protest every week calling for an end to the division between Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the PA in the West Bank) (Natil, 2015). Women's groups from Hamas in the Gaza Strip rejected these protests from ideological perspectives only. It should reconsider a creative policy between national, social and democratic promotion (Siam, 2016).

The current political circumstances, including the customs and traditions of masculine society, place the women in much worse circumstances and they need to improve and develop their capacity regularly. 'If women succeed to bridge this gap and understanding of women's circumstances well, it will assist women to design realistic plans leading to a positive reflection of their future', as Tagreed Al Mour, a prominent journalist, says (Almour, 2016).

2. *Leadership Crisis:* There has been a leadership crisis in the Women's Movement with regard to structure, practicing democracy and changing the leadership by conducting regular elections since Oslo agreement in 1993. The movement has been unable to regain its popularity and has already lost and failed to recruit and mobilise professional women to its ranks. Leaders are located mainly in urban populations and the main cities of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and are less focussed in the marginalised and remote areas. Some of the practices of male leaders who failed to introduce a module of leadership, governance and management also pushed many women to resign and leave their work in local councils or political groups after 2004. Political division and tension have also already challenged women's engagement in local council and political groups because many women prefer to avoid engagement in political division and conflict (Almour, 2016; Al Samak, 2016; Siam, 2016). Irregular elections have been a challenge for women's social and political participation, as women have no incentive to run for a leadership position in a local council or the legislative council, while the last legislative election took place in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 2006 (Almour, 2016; Al Samak, 2016; Siam, 2016).

The current national body represented by the General Union of Women is powerless. There is no real cooperation and coordination between women's organisations in addition to the absence of a model and charismatic woman leader who can lead this Women Union 'Women's Movement'. This also weakens women's confidence in their leadership because there is no consensus on a leader owing to ideological difference (Al Samak, 2016). Women can

have a stronger role and deliver numerous mechanisms such mobilisation and advocate to end the Palestinian division between the national movement and the Islamic movement; however, women have no clear role, for example, in the process of rebuilding the Gaza Strip, owing to a number of reasons and factors just mentioned, the political, social, technical and/or organisational crises facing the Women's Movement (Almour, 2016).

The Women's Movement needs to build transparent and democratic representative bodies that reflect the diversities of women's cultural, social and political backgrounds and ideologies (Al Samak, 2016). Today, the elite women of the national groups 'Women Movement' suffer fragmentation and division. Women Movement has no initiative to reunite itself under one body. But women can have a stronger role and deliver numerous mechanisms such as mobilisation and advocate to end the Palestinian division between the national movement and the Islamic movement despite the current technical, social and political challenges as Youser, a Gaza based civil society activist, says:

women movement plays a major role in strengthening and activating women political and social participation; however, there have been some obstacles challenging women's active engagement in the decision-making process. (Youser, 2012)

The overwhelming majority of women did not vote for woman candidates who ran for elections in 2004–2006. This has been a crucial and problematic issue in changing women's social and political empowerment. Their participation as candidates standing for election was very weak, owing to fragmentation and division that had already affected the Palestinian politics and civil society at large. This also weakens women's confidence in their leadership because there is no consensus on a leader owing to ideological differences (Al Samak, 2016).

3. *Programs and Technical Capacity:* The current leadership also fails to identify realistic programs to introduce social change. Women still consider the political discourse and ideological theories, and they cannot mix between discourse and civil society activities based on the priorities and needs of women themselves who live under occupation. The Women's Movement, for instance, could not take a role in the reconstruction process of the Gaza Strip after the destructive war of 2014, despite the fact that the process was controlled by few officials without the real participation of men and women (Siam, 2016). Many donors, however, who pledged to support the process of rebuilding the Gaza Strip at the Cairo conference of October 2015, have already failed to channel funds to do so (Natil, 2015).

There have been a number of women activists who believe that foreign aid or funding contributed to promote the concept of women's political participation, but it still has a negative impact on civil society programmes and capacity building, as (Almour, 2016; Al Samak, 2016; Siam, 2016) have already agreed. Some donors have special agendas and conditions on specific community activities and do not support certain women's organisations that sympathised with certain political groups; however, there are some donors who have no political or conditional agendas. Foreign aid also made limited contributions to women's political participation because the projects' funding, target groups and duration were limited. These projects, however, contributed to raise women's awareness of issues of elections such as laws, campaign management, advocacy and building alliances between various political and social groups of mutual interest (Siam, 2016).

Foreign aid also plays a role in weakening the Women's Movement and its leaders, despite the fact of promoting the concepts and values of women's social and political participation as journalists. Mrs Almour (2016) states, 'Foreign aid and its agenda affected negatively women movement because it is not sustainable despite the importance impact on women's political and social participation'. It also redirected the priorities of women according to the donors' agenda and women's organisations wasted time and resources in seeking funding to keep its own existence rather than focussing on women's needs and urgent issues. These concepts enlighten and raise women's awareness of modern issues of empowerment organising themselves and participating in social and political activities; however, these women's organisations have been unable to influence marginalised women and introduce a positive change (Al Samak, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact of the challenges of the culture of society, political structure and crisis of women leadership of local activism, grassroots groups, women still fight for their full membership in the community by engaging in political, social and civil rights and responsibilities.

The PA, however, still functions under Israeli sovereignty without any control even over their national numbers. Israel is solely responsible, as the occupying power, for granting national citizenship numbers to Palestinians at birth, even after the United Nations General Assembly recognised Palestine as a non-member state on 29 November 2012. This restriction on citizenship numbers constitutes a big dilemma for society at large. Thousands of women who used to live abroad have visited the OPT. They are still waiting for their national numbers to be granted by the Israelis. Those Palestinians who decide

to leave the occupied Territories, including the Gaza Strip, are not allowed to return, as Israel controls the Palestinian borders. Thousands of families and women are still divided, some inside and some outside of OPT, as a result of Israeli control of issuing national numbers.

In spite of restrictions on citizenship, Palestinian women are always connected and very loyal to their own nuclear families, and extended clans and groups. It is easy to observe their strong connections to their families via various social, cultural, economic and financial contributions and engagement. They are always eager to contribute and engage actively in various social, cultural and political activities and local councils elections as well. The local council is considered one of the important organisations serving the local community and increasing grassroots' participation in activities, despite the enormous challenges that face women's civil, social and political engagement and participation. However, local councils have the basic job of collecting waste, infrastructure development, sewage and water supplies. For example, they played an essential and strong role in the local councils' elections taking place in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 2004 and 2005. They also rushed to cast their votes in the presidential and national election polls of 2005 and 2006, respectively. Their votes were crucial in changing the political landscape when Hamas won in 2006 (Natil, 2015).

Local councils have already improved deliveries and involvement in gender and women's activities. Before the advent of the PA in 1993, the employees of local councils or municipalities were all men, but all local councils developed their structure so that Palestinian women could participate in being a full member and citizen of society, in accordance with the Palestinian basic law of the PA established in 1994. However, 56.5% of the total expressed their satisfaction regarding the level of women working in the municipality, compared to 43.5% of them who expressed dissatisfaction with the level of working women when asked according to Society Voice Foundation (2011). This shows that 46.0% of them said that the main reason lies in the marginalisation of the role of women in municipal work, and 18.6% attributed that to the exclusion of women from the decision-making process, in addition to the inefficiency of women in dealing with the problems of citizens, 16.8% said that the reason relates to women's lack of efficiency in the workplace and not working quickly enough. However, the councils' engagement in civic activities has already increased after the enactment of the Quotas and the enforcement of two women in the councils via elections. Local councils, their elected members and women in particular engaged with civil society and women's organisations in raising women's issues such as challenges, restriction of public freedom, political exclusion and domestic violence.

This included examining the traditional and cultural restrictions facing women's efforts and contribution to citizenship. It also presents the impact of the social movements on the concepts of citizenship in OPT by bringing the contribution of the Women's Movement to the development of citizenship practices despite the fact of the paralysed political system as [Society Voice Foundation \(2011\)](#) study shows that 62.3% of the majority of women indicated that women's participation in the council has had a significant impact on the decision-making process, compared to 37.7% who denied any influence of the participation of elected women on the process of decision-making in the council. However, 77.7% believe that the presence of women in the council means strengthening their role in the community; 71.9% said that their participation in the council supports civil society; 71.5 % said that women's participation is important regarding the implementation of development plans, while 63.5% said that women's participation promotes the values of pluralism and democracy. 36.9% of women indicated that they have never received any information on the municipal structure, while 63.1% confirmed that the information about the council and its structure is largely available to citizens through various tools. While 68.9% believed that information about the council and its structure is available on the local council's website, 64.6% said that they received the information from local council members and 54.3% said that they got it from town hall meetings while 52.4% said they accessed the information from local meetings ([Society Voice Foundation, 2011](#)).

[Society Voice Foundation \(2011\)](#) study shows that local councils still play an important role in the life of citizens at large. The study shows that the local councils could contribute to enriching the values of respecting human rights in general and women's rights, in particular, and involvement in supporting participatory, transparent and accountable governing bodies. Activists at the grassroots level undertake social and traditional responsibilities and duties, similar equally. However, society generally prefers a man in both the public and private spheres. Some women's groups do not have the capacity to maintain themselves and challenge the social, economic, financial and political pressures or even have mechanisms to become involved in the policy-making processes of poverty alleviation and civil society empowerment. They still face a great deal of social, economic and political challenges that hinder women from obtaining their full rights.

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CHALLENGES OF VIOLENCE TO PARTICIPATORY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the challenges of violence to young women's grassroots participatory engagement and their contribution to the development of their society. It also includes an examination of the role of civil society organisations' (CSOs) activities to help eliminate the phenomenon of domestic violence, for example, against women in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). Young women of OPT have been subject to various cycle of violence under foreign occupation and domestic violence. The marginalised and vulnerable groups face violence as a serious threat to both their civic engagement and the community participation. CSOs seek to promote citizens' engagement in the decision-making process and to increase their power to decide on change defined as 'participatory democracy' by (Aragones & Sánchez-Pagés, 2009; Hilmer, 2010). Michels and De Graaf (2010) argue that citizen participation is usually considered as a significant aspect of democracy and has positive effects on the quality of democracy.

This chapter also examines the challenge of violence in terms of community peace and development. It also discusses the relationship between CSOs and young women leaders as a case study to eliminate the phenomenon of violence. On 25 November 1960, the United Nations (UN) designated an International Day for the elimination of violence against women. The UN chose 25 November to commemorate the Mirabal sisters, three political activists whom the Dominican Republic dictator Rafael Trujillo ordered brutally to be assassinated in 1960. In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action also introduced further recognition of the violence against women as a

hindrance to women's full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The UN General Assembly defines violence against women as:

any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (UN, 1993)

Violence represents a major challenge for integration, advancement and engagement in the development of societies. It is used against women and is a consequence of the unequal power relations within the family and in society in general. [Catherine Müller and Jean-Pierre Tranchant \(2017\)](#) write violence against women consists of various forms as psychological nature, cursing, insults, yelling and screaming. One of the major roots and causes of violence is the perception of them as inferior something that has been passed on from generation to generation throughout centuries and has turned an inherited customs and tradition. Violence can be divided into three areas: verbal, non-verbal and physical. There are a number of individuals who use verbal violence, for example, insults, threats, backbiting, gossip, humiliation and deprivation. In addition, there are many people who use physical violence such as beating, punching, biting and slapping. These different means of verbal, non-verbal and physical violence cause victim to feel a sense of fear and insecurity, guilt, shame, introversion, isolation and loss of self-confidence and self-esteem. Violence also limits access to resources and prevents them from enjoying their rights as human beings. It obstructs their contribution to development and community peacebuilding. Violence against women is a widespread phenomenon in all countries of the world, owing to a range of cultural, educational, environmental and economic factors and causes. UN Women study found in 2017 that 80% of men and 48% of women believe that men should be the decision-makers at home ([UN Women & Promundo USA, 2017](#)).

There have been, however, many CSOs active in delivering a range of services, aimed at the promotion of women's engagement in participatory grassroots processes despite living in a high level of violence under foreign occupation, poverty and conservatism in the OPT. These CSOs represent various spectrums of social, cultural and political backgrounds that have already delivered a range of actions to eliminate violence and promote community peacebuilding despite shifting political landscapes in the OPT. They seek to increase resilience and civic engagement of marginalised and vulnerable groups via a process of participatory grassroots activities in decision-making to help integrate them into the development process of their society. There have

been distinguished women leaders who involved in increasing awareness and understanding of the severity and prevalence of acts of violence against the civilians. They can challenge and break the cycle of conflict and practice the concepts of peacebuilding in their own communities (Noma, Aker, & Freeman, 2012, pp. 7–32). They also try to enhance awareness of community and government responses to violence, in order to assist policymakers, and planning and resource allocation. CSOs can also help identify possible points of intervention by examining factors associated with a heightened risk of violence. They test and employ tools and information that contribute to evaluation efforts of eliminating violence.

To understand this phenomenon of violence against women in the OPT, it is essential to examine a number of social causes and political factors.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Women have been subject to direct and indirect violence through various means and practices (detention, curfews, land confiscation, psychological torture, movement restriction, checkpoints, injuries, expulsion and assassination) exerted by those occupying over the Palestinian land since 1967 when Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The current threat of Israeli occupation to annex the West Bank has already increased pressure on the Palestinian people in general and the marginalised and vulnerable groups as women in particular (Care International, 2020). Palestinians and Israelis have never lived in peace, security and trust despite the fact of the Oslo agreement, signed between PLO and Israel in 1993. Marginalised and vulnerable groups bear the brunt of the escalation of the conflict and decades of Israeli occupation, while in Palestinian society they are subjected to a system of laws and norms that results in treating them as unequal members of that society. They are the most vulnerable and marginalised segments of the population. The Israeli authorities, however, have expanded the settlements in the West Bank by more than 100% in the last 20 years and the use of violence has been language rather than coexistence between the two sides. Ghassan Abu-Sittah (2020) discusses dynamics of settler colonialism of the Israeli project including its siege on the Gaza Strip during the pandemic.

Women have already paid price for this environment as they represent and compromise half of the population in Palestine estimated at 4.88 million at the end 2016, including 2.48 million males (50.8%) and 2.40 million females (49.2%), whereas the sex ratio stood at 103.3, which means that there are 103 males for every 100 females (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), 2017).

By 2006, Israel had already tightened the political and economic siege on the Gaza Strip where Hamas is located. The situation has worsened and the political system has been almost paralysed since the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) lost its role and power in political and public life in 2007. The PLC lost its power of legislation and oversight of the executive power (government). The members of the PLC have already failed to issue or pass a single law, effecting marginalised and vulnerable groups in the last 15 years. During this period, the Gaza Strip has been separated from the West Bank as Hamas forces expelled the security agency of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 2006 (Abu Saif, 2014). Hamas imposed its government on Gaza. Citizens including women faced uncertain situations where the PA no longer had a physical existence. Palestinian society was divided between two governments under occupation. The takeover also contributed to divisions within the social structure of some small and extended families whose members belonged to both the Hamas and the PA. The division deepened the Palestinian wounds and human insecurity at all levels in the OPT, and the Gaza Strip in particular. The Gaza Strip and the West Bank were now without an authority with the ability to resolve issues relating to borders, movement, fuel, energy, electricity and raw materials (Natil, 2015, pp. 98–116).

Gidon Levy (2010) writes that the Gaza's civilians faced dire shortages of food, water, cooking gas, fuel and medical care, owing to insecurities, the enforced closure of all of Gaza's borders and alleged serious violations of international humanitarian law. Supply of electricity was sharply down, and in some places, sewage was spilling into the streets. In this escalated environment of violence, absence of peace and siege under foreign occupation for decades, marginalised, vulnerable groups' young people's suffering had already increased, owing to a lack of personal, health, community, economic and political securities. People of the Gaza Strip, for instance, have been living in a miserable social, political and economic environment since September 2005 (Abu-Sittah, 2020). Life there had been already worsened acutely and become impossible after three successive military operations in 2008, 2012 and 2014, which left thousands of civilians injured and dead (Abu Saif, 2014). Their suffering, for example, in the Gaza Strip has increased since the 2014 war 'Operation Protective Edge'. This operation created a new environment of destruction, family displacement and overloaded surviving families with devastating psychological problems. It damaged or destroyed 17,800 housing units, left 100,000 Gazans displaced and more than 2,251 dead (UNOCHA, 2017). The majority of those killed were Palestinian civilians, compared with 66 Israeli military fatalities, five Israeli civilian casualties and one Thai civilian killed (UNOCHA, 2017). Those displaced Palestinians lost not only their

homes but also their dignity, when they found themselves without any shelter. In addition, they also suffered from serious psychological problems because of the three large Israeli military offensives that caused a major loss of life and the destruction of an already impoverished infrastructure (Koek, Clutterbuck, & Kafarna, 2015).

The Israeli restrictions on building materials, however, continue to cause delays to this day. Gazans reconstructed just 2,000 out of the 19,000 homes destroyed in 2015. It looks as if the *Gaza reconstruction will take a century to complete due to the Israeli blockade*, as reported by Oxfam in February 2015. Abu Saif (2014) also argues that the Israeli forces have used the Gaza Strip as laboratory for developing death machines. He also argues that Israel uses the Palestinians as a field test to improve the efficiency of its newly developed weapon. This complicated and hostile environment imposes huge challenges to local communities, the PA, UN agencies and the morality of the free world. It has already increased pressures and demands on the work of local and international organisations in achieving their peace and development agenda. This has created massive new challenges for the PA, Hamas, international organisations and CSOs in Gaza, as they struggle to meet citizens' needs and demands transparently and efficiently, not least because resources are sorely lacking after 10 years of blockades. The UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov following his first visit to Gaza on 29 April 2015, said:

No human being who visits can remain untouched by the terrible devastation that one sees here in Gaza, and as shocking as the devastation of the buildings might be, the devastation of people's livelihoods is 10 times more shocking. (Mladenov, 2015)

The entire population is dependent on international assistance. Those people had hoped that their homes would already have been built by this time, but unfortunately, international donors did not commit to their pledges of reconstructing the Gaza Strip because Israel has imposed a siege on the area for about 15 years. Ghassan Abu-Sittah (2020) also discusses Israel's siege on Gaza in light of the emergence of Covid-19. The UN Commission on the Status of Women also expressed grave concern about situations of 'Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territories including East Jerusalem resulting from the severe impact of the ongoing illegal occupation and all of its manifestations' (UN, 2017).

More than 15,000 women have been arrested since 1967 – 70 women including 17 girls still under 18 years old remain behind bars in Israeli jails in very miserable conditions.

The UN Agencies for Human Rights and Commission on the Status of Women in particular, however, also keep expressing grave concerns that Palestinian girls and women who face specific gender challenges continue to be kept in Israeli prisons under very harsh circumstances. Those who have given birth or suffered from sexual harassment in the prisons need proper access to medication. The commission also called upon the Israeli Occupation frequently to respect the civil, social, cultural, political rights of women in the OPT including East Jerusalem. This commission also reaffirms that these measures of occupation remain the major obstacle for Palestinian women with regard to their self-reliance, advancement and integration in the development of their society. However, the international community should continue provide these women with emergency humanitarian assistance, considering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2017).

Natil (2020b) argues that Covid-19 and Israeli threat to annex 30% of the West Bank territories impose new challenges and serious barriers to effective CSOs and women's engagement and community participation in the OPT. These circumstances have made the Palestinian women suffer from a high level of violence, poverty, lack of opportunities and absence of hope. These impacts are further implied in contexts of fragility, conflict, refuge, displacement and emergencies where social cohesion is already undermined and institutional capacity and services are limited (Care International, 2020).

This environment of escalated violence from time to time has already made grassroots participation empowerment activities impossible as the local organisations need times to assist women and their families to recover from and accommodate each cycle of violence. The priority of young women and the entire community is now to accommodate and provide the basic needs for their families and children who witnessed the many cycles of violence and subsequent military operations during the past 11 years. Many young women and people lose their interest in the values of civic engagement and participatory democracy. They also have to deal with an increasing level of domestic violence.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Farah Najjar (2020) writes that domestic violence against women has increased since the beginning of 2020 as 11 women were killed and at least 5 women have been killed at the hands of their abusers. Even before Covid-19, the rates of violence against women were high. Society has been challenged by losing some of its core values of solidarity while domestic violence is escalating from year to year. Women, for example, still fight to improve their position

and move from the margins of society to be key decision-makers in civil, economic, political and community work, and these situations have not changed. Some women have also suffered social pressure and violence as PCBS reported in its 2005 national survey that approximately 66% of women in the OPT were subjected to psychological violence and almost 25% were subjected to physical violence by their husbands. This state of legal framework complicates the situations of women in terms of family, marriage, divorce, violence and so on. However, the Palestinian President, Mahmud Abbas signed the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on Women's Day, 8 March 2009. This was a very positive step to sign the convention, but the level of violence against women has increased from year to year as that Palestinian women face many forms of violence, 76.4% of Gazan women being subjected to emotional violence, 34.8% to physical violence, 14.9% to sexual violence, 78.9% to social violence and 88.3% to economic violence (PCBS, 2013, 7 March).

This environment of hostilities had already directly or indirectly affected some men who felt of their superior to women for a number of cultural, social and or financial reasons and used violence against their partners to achieve this tendency or power. 'Honour killings' had been increased with 25 women were murdered in 'honour killings' in 2013, while 13 women were killed in 2012 for various reasons according to women's centre for legal aid and counselling (PCBS, 2013, March 7). This had already made some women to live with their violent intimate partner because of their failure to change their partner's behaviour (Baloushah, 2019, pp. 2332–2336). According to the PCBS, about 37% of women who ever been married were exposed to one form of violence by their partner – 29.9% in the West Bank and 51.1% in the Gaza Strip (PCBS, 2017).

Gender-based Violence appears to have increased among Palestinians since the onset of the Covid-19 crisis and limitations on movement. The violence against women has increased in Gaza during quarantine and lockdown as Covid-19 risks creating and exacerbating women's vulnerabilities and gender inequalities in Palestine (UN Women, 2020). The Gazan women, however, have already paid an extra price during ongoing conflict and subsequent crisis. The factsheets of SAWA, a Palestinian West Bank-based CSO, indicate that calls from women seeking support increased from 40% to 58% of the total once the hotline extended its hours (indicating that women had not found the time or privacy to call), with calls regarding abuse and domestic violence from partners increasing by 38% (Care International, 2020). Society Voice Foundation (SVF), a Gaza-based civil society, addresses many important topics to raise awareness of women and society about fighting violence

against women in the pandemic and promote women's social and political participation at all levels (Amer, 2020).

The public health service is delivered by Palestinian government and UNRWA's partial support for the refugees camps. Tartir and Hawari (2020) discuss that Palestinian civil society has been playing a significant role to support the government's role in deal with containing the spread of Covid-19. There have been a number of CSOs running hospitals, community health centres and clinics (Balousha, 2020). These institutions, however, have been suffering from serious barriers and restriction, owing to political instability, violence, Israeli occupation and dependency on the foreign aid (Natil, 2014, 2019, 2020a; Tartir & Hawari, 2020). Despite these significant deliveries and contributions by the Palestinian CSOs in the pandemic, they have been facing major challenges as a result of the repercussions of the successive crises striking the Palestinian community owing to at the current hash economic, social, political and funding shifts, owing to the siege since 2005 (Abu-Sittah, 2020). Natil (2020a) discusses that these shifts have already imposed a serious challenge to effective CSOs that provide services to the residents of the sector, in various fields, such as education and health, and improving livelihoods, unemployment and infrastructure projects has already challenged their scope of work and intervention.

Despite lack of funding and lockdown, CSOs' staff and volunteers work from home and engage with their society through internet, and some CSOs run awareness through social media (Asad, 2020). Balousha (2020) discusses Palestinian media discourse and engagement of some CSOs during Covid-19. CSOs' engagement, through social media like zoom and Facebook, continues to run some online sessions to raise awareness about fighting violence against women in the pandemic. SVF continued working with marginalised and vulnerable groups of women at the wider society to run local activities to defy and challenge the shifts hoping and seeking for a better life (Amer, 2020). SVF also succeeded to implement eight public online meetings to discuss the mechanisms of participation in decision-making, the role of media and empowerment of women and the promotion of human rights and community peacebuilding in the pandemic from March to July. This includes implementing psychological and social support sessions for children who are in need of play, have fun and carry out some activities in the pandemic (Amer, 2020).

Palestinian society generally assigns women to household work and bringing up children. There are some groups, including women, who believe that the proper place for women is in the house, cleaning, taking care of children and preparing food. The majority of men believe that women are not able to deliver and contribute to social development policies and society's political process.

There have been, however, very few young leaders and local organisations in society who have attempted to change the circumstances and constraints that have already placed women in difficult situations. The Palestinian CSOs have long experiences of accommodating their scope of work and activities owing to unstable society with ongoing political and economic shifts.

ECONOMIC PRESSURE

Müller and Tranchant (2017) argue that economic deterioration has been the second most prevalent form of abuse against women since the last during the summer of 2014. Men's superiority over women also encourages them to control domestic economic and financial issues. Economics has been a crucial issue, motivating men to use domestic violence against women. Poverty and unemployment hit new record every year, owing to the economic, political instability, and a lack of opportunities and investments. Women are considered the most vulnerable and marginalised of groups that face the everyday difficulties of living in areas of conflict such as the Gaza Strip. The PCBS reported that female participation rates remained low with 17.4% of females in the labour force in 2012 compared to 10.3% in 2001. The male labour force participation rate was still around four times higher than that of females. There was a gap in the average daily wages of men and women: the average daily wage for women represented 86.8% of that of men in 2012 (PCBS, 2013, 7 March).

In 2020, the economic, social and/or political situations of women have not changed as there is still a gap in the participation rate and average daily wages of men and women. However, some women still seek to play a role in the market, fighting poverty, inheritance deprivation, domestic violence and unemployment. Women experience a high rate of poverty as the economic circumstances are already so bad in the Gaza Strip (UNOCHA, 2020). The Gaza Strip survives on donations from international aid organisations. The majority of women are located in the most vulnerable and marginalised areas of the Gaza Strip. The UN Commission on the Status of Women also expressed concern about the high rates of poverty and unemployment. The document cited Israel's illegal practices of 'home demolitions, evictions of Palestinians, the revocation of residency rights, and arbitrary detention and imprisonment' as parts of the systematic violation of their human rights (UN, 2017). The female participation rate in the labour force was 19.3% of the total female population at working age in 2016, compared to 10.3% in 2001, while the male participation rate was 71.6% in 2016. There was also a pay

gap in the average daily wages between males and females; the average daily wage for females was NIS 83.3 compared to NIS 114.1 for males (PCBS, 2017, March 7).

These circumstances also imposed huge challenges and restrictions on CSOs to improve citizens' practices in general and marginalised and young people participation in particular. Civil society has already faced problems in community participatory engagement and activism since the last local and legislative elections and the Palestinian division in 2007 (Siam, 2016). In spite of these difficult circumstances, CSOs still attempted to provide a safe place for many young people to share their concerns and voices. Norma E. Aker and Freeman (2012) discuss the importance of women's voices to breaking cycles of conflict and deepening the concept of peacebuilding. Violence, however, is getting worse at the domestic level as the use of violence is justifiable and can be tolerated easily. It also becomes a way of life for many people. There have been increasing numbers of victimised women, for example, in the Gaza Strip where there is no 'safe shelter' managed by a governmental/public entity, NGO and/or private sector organisation. Those victimised women are in desperate need for a safe shelter to accommodate them and to provide psychological and social services (Young, 2017).

SAFE PLACES

Those grassroots groups and local CSOs delivered assistance to provide safe places for marginalised and young people to get engaged and lead some local initiatives and events. Those groups had already implemented hundreds of civil society projects, programmes and actions to fight violence and contribute to an equitable, open and democratic society through raising public awareness of development issues and promoting education for development, and to mobilise greater support for actions against poverty. Those CSOs still attempt to increase community engagement in activities of leadership, voluntary and local councils, freedom of expression through media and advocacy to eliminate technical and cultural obstacles of violence as Natil (2019, 2020a) discuss. Many victims do not have available local organisations, trusted persons or a professional place to share their grave concerns; however, CSOs and grassroots centres were located in the marginalised areas that have been a safe haven as Shinaz Mislh, the Director of the Maghazi Women's Centre, says:

These centres represent a very peaceful environment for women, where there are no other places in the refugee camps to visit and

or meet with peers, friends freely or and participate in social and grassroots activities. (Mislh, 2016)

These centres and CSO represent a safe and trusted place for many young women who are victimised by a husband or a member of the family. These rapid services are provided mainly by CSOs which are considered the most responsive and professional to the victims. These victims feel that they are secured in a friendly environment where they can express themselves. Women can meet and chat freely and can feel secure to share their concerns and problems with each other and specialists there, if applicable. These centres represent an essential focal point for marginalised young women's 'participatory grassroots' where they can share concerns and ideas and to find the assistance of their peers, friends or specialist to help solve their social and or individual problems (Natil, 2020a).

These places give women opportunities for resilience, confidence and security to encourage them to stay in solidarity together and participate in social and political activities as well (Amer, 2016). CSO and local civic groups, however, have not been able to challenge these situations and the complicated environment of increasing violence, destruction, despair and marginalisation. They could contribute actively to promote society's values and practices of respecting women's equal social and political participation at all levels. They could put into practice their new skills and knowledge of active participatory engagement in local events to develop themselves and their communities. They could elect their representatives in different positions at the local levels. They could contribute to improving the social delivery of local organisations through community work and participating in social accountability campaigns implemented by CSOs and local grassroots centres. The CSOs challenge the shifting political landscapes under occupation and escalating levels of violence to reach local people and enable marginalised and vulnerable them to gain a voice and defy the *de facto* as Natil (2020a) discusses.

There have been a number of young women leaders who seek to create a new life of hope at the national and international levels by representing their fellows. A number of successful stories of young people achievements in different fields and their contributions have already made a huge difference in that they encourage much more civic engagement and community participation in the development of their society living under long-term foreign occupation and violence. Haneen Rizk Al Samak and Fida Amer, for example, showed high skills of challenge, resilience, local leadership and empowerment and contributed to their local community by conducting various community activities. Haneen a mother of four children visited displaced families and

led local research and advocacy work in order to report the challenges facing the reconstruction process. Haneen visited many women and their families who lost their homes during the war 2014 ([Al Samak, 2016](#)). Fida also led various projects and programmes including a local project to raise the voices of victims who lost their homes during the 2014 war. Fida is a mother of six children, but spends eight hours daily on the project. Her project aims at working with displaced families and understanding their issues. Active listening to displaced women is a crucial point of understanding their needs and voices. She took a role in the project to assist her organisation in conducting a national and international advocacy campaign to raise the voices and demands of displaced communities, despite their administrative and financial resources ([Amer, 2016](#)).

These participatory civic engagement activities could provide a real indication of changes occurring in the lives of group women's who are empowered in the techniques of leadership capacity with emphasis on freedom of expression and community voluntary work to Covid-19 challenges. However, women participation in community and political organisations supporting the Covid-19 response is marginal, with implications for its reach and impact despite the health, political and economic shifts in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip ([UNOCHA, 2020](#)).

CONCLUSION

These civic engagement activities also indicated the power of young women leaders' contribution to improving the situations of their targeted groups in the concept and practices of freedom of expression and public freedoms. They have done so despite social, cultural, economic and political challenges and have assisted in becoming much more resilient and defiant. They have a long history of organising themselves and leading activities to fight violence. This included broadcasting and circulating materials and organising activities to foster a free press and civic engagement and participation in the public policies agenda. Their various missions aim for promotion civic rights, public freedoms and contribution to society – despite living under occupation. CSOs also employed education to make social and culture changes in society at large. They used education to achieve peacebuilding and advocate non-violence. Education is a significant tool for the Palestinian to struggle peacefully and represent their identity, country and society in the international arena.

The Palestinian society has been living in very severe circumstances and a lack of human security at all levels, owing to the absence of peace process, economic development and the Palestinian division. Young women, during this

period, therefore, have witnessed these days unprecedented state of poor public freedoms, socio-political deadlock at all levels, owing to the paralysed political system, social and geographic division and the hardship of a poor economic life. The overwhelming majority of young women aged 18–30 years old in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are jobless and suffering from a high level of poverty, and lack of opportunities. They also suffer from ineffective, inefficient and insufficient policies in the public life, which have already placed their lives in a worse situation. Young women have been practically misused by the politicians to achieve very narrow political interests regardless of good governance practices, active grassroots engagement and community participation. They have no real influences over the public policies and record a very low level of civic participation. Young women who call for change, improving human rights, democracy and peacebuilding would face a number of social and political threats. They are banned from freedom of expression, media freedom, the right of associations and the right to organise peaceful actions and marches.

CSOs' operations contributed to increase marginalised groups' defiance, resilience and public freedoms by promoting young leaders' participation in public policies, freedoms in their local community. Local community organisations were involved in selecting young women leaders from different areas of social and political sciences, development, journalism, public relations, media on principles and techniques of civic participation, monitoring, advocacy, information technology, transparency, accountability and legislation. These activities of CSOs from different areas activated the target groups to practise their newly acquired skills by forming young people's grassroots forums. The forums led the young people participating in conducting public advocacy campaigns to improve their civic engagement in public policies at all levels. CSOs attempt to eliminate violence against women and contribute towards an equitable, open and democratic society through raising public awareness of development issues. However, the CSOs should exert more efforts to face challenges by cooperating with the public institutions to promote education for development. Despite the financial and technical expertise, CSOs should continue to prepare and train psychologists and specialists in treating victimised women. These activities will contribute to changing the prevalence of societal culture against woman through conducting meetings, seminars and conferences that tackle a woman's role in the community.

CSOs should support young women through actions against poverty based on a solid national plan. Civil society organisations should also maximise their efforts to increasing programmes to protect women from violence at all levels. The PA in the OPT has already failed to decrease the phenomena of domestic violence, owing to non-effective policies and external pressure from a lack of human security under occupation. More complications come

from the Palestinian legal system, which does not help to decrease domestic violence by effective judicial procedures and actions because it is controlled by a number of conflicting sources. For example, the legal framework of the West Bank is predominantly controlled by the Jordanian Family and Penal Codes, and the Gaza Strip is dominated by the Egyptian laws among others sources, which include Sharia law, Ottoman law and the Israeli military authorities.

Regular reports of UN, Palestinians institutions and international human rights organisations have confirmed that the Israeli occupation is mainly responsible for violations against women and girls and remains a major challenge for their self-reliance, achievement and integration in the development of their society. The PA still functions under Israeli control. Israel has been the solely responsible as occupying authority for the movement of Palestinians in the OPT even after the UN General Assembly recognised Palestine as non-member state on 29 November 2012. There have been a number of women, however, who have attempted to change their lives and contribute to their communities despite the miserable and inhuman circumstances in which they live. They embrace resilience and empowerment although they are the most vulnerable segment of society, owing to a culture of extreme conservatism and violence.

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INTERNATIONALLY SPONSORED PROGRAMS: EU AID AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter studies the European Union's (EU) women's empowerment-sponsored programmes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). This chapter also explores the engagement of young women in gender justice activities and discusses how, and to what extent, the programmes they undertake contribute to long-term changes in attitudes. This chapter focuses in particular on women's empowerment programmes, which have been introduced using participatory methodologies. This chapter shows the impact of the EU's fund on the services delivered by international and civil society organisations (CSOs) and, in particular, on the attitudes and behaviours of women in relation to building women's social and political empowerment and institutions even after the 'peace process' of the Oslo Agreement. Women's integration into the peace process, including the reconstruction and rebuilding process, following the conflict is therefore very important ([Potter, 2008](#), pp. 142–143). In other words, it examines the efforts and endeavours made by local organisations to achieve the various objectives of women's empowerment by organising capacity-building training activities, community monitoring and advocacy, research and field studies, awareness, and media releases.

Have the EU-funded programmes succeeded in empowering women's civil society in OPT? EU aid to Palestine is delivered and channelled mainly through the following programmes: European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, EU Peacebuilding Initiative, Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development, Food Security, East Jerusalem programmes, and Area C. despite 'the Limits of Securitized peace' as Alaa [Tartir \(2018\)](#) argues.

The EU has identified five pillars to promote coordination, cooperation and the sharing of responsibilities among its member states to channel aid in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The EU, the United Kingdom and Denmark lead the first pillar of governance reform, fiscal consolidation and policy. The United Kingdom and the Netherlands lead the pillar of the rule of law, citizen safety and human rights. Finland, Belgium, Italy and the EU lead the pillar of sustainable service delivery. Germany and France lead the pillar of access to self-sufficient water and energy services. Spain and the EU lead the pillar of sustainable economic development. Gender equality and civil society engagement are key crosscutting issues of these five pillars (EU Representative Office Jerusalem, 2017).

This chapter examines EU aid programmes from the civil society perspective by examining the role of local organisations, in cooperation with international service agencies, in implementing various women's engagement programmes and institutions in civil society. [Baliamoune-Lutz \(2016, pp. 320–341\)](#) argues that these programmes have been an important topic for international development. There have been a number of EU non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working closely with various local organisations to empower women's engagement in decision-making processes and to increase their power. Women participate actively in popular, collective public and economic activities to get rid of foreign occupation, division, violence and poverty. Women, however, may view their empowerment through security, transformative change and participation ([Porter, 2013, pp. 1–14](#)). These issues impose real challenges to international donors and the Palestinian CSOs, owing to social, political and financial shifts ([Natil, 2020a](#)).

CHALLENGES AND AID BALANCE

Have EU-sponsored women's empowerment programmes altered the ways that women think about their way of life? This chapter argues that such programmes have already contributed to the culture of women's empowerment concepts and practices to become engaged in civil society activities. These programmes, however, still need to make significant headway in changing women attitudes in terms of grassroots and community peacebuilding. The example of EU-funded women's empowerment projects in OPT is used to clarify these linkages between women's empowerment activities in grassroots building via CSOs. Women's empowerment, through the lenses of security, transformation and participation, can be achieved via the contribution of active CSOs. This power of women's organisations can be a part of the change process, and,

together with the impact of the network of women's organisations and their engagement in undertaking effective campaigns, can make a change in reality in terms of community peacebuilding and development (Natil, 2020b). The EU works closely with civil society to deliver these thematic programmes. The EU channels more than 20% of projects through international and Palestinian CSOs (EU Representative Office Jerusalem, 2017).

Women have the power to contribute to the development of their society by participating in civic engagement, as well as by being part of organisations for non-profit activities. The EU Partnership for Peace Programme plays an essential role in this context by funding a number of CSOs to raise their voices, which are seldom heard beyond their communities. Women activists need to continue and be supported in their work against dual oppression from occupation and patriarchal constraints, if women's rights and gender equality are to be secured in Palestine (Richter-Devroe, 2011).

In 2003, the EU started to pay more attention to civil society and balance its financial support between humanitarian and developmental aid (Fattal, 2010). Some women's CSOs shifted their scope of work to deliver relief services responding to different cycles of violence over 15 years in the Occupied Territories. Before the Oslo Agreement in 1993, women's CSOs aimed at the mobilisation of women leaders at the grassroots level to get engaged in liberation activities and contribute to ending the Israeli occupation as Jad (2007, 2018) discusses. However, these have been very fragmented and less focussed on national priorities, and they have become involved in the details of the daily needs of a small number of its 'elite or select members'. Their focus is now to secure funding to maintain the existence of these organisations, regardless of the priorities of women's issues (Siam, 2016).

CSOs are dependent on foreign aid, including the EU that gives opportunities for the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable to be heard by implementing their own activities. Despite these problems, some women leaders have generally learned from, and engaged with, civil society and its burgeoning activities in the aftermath of the Oslo Agreement. Islah Jad (2007), however, argues that development of the NGO movement helps to demobilise Palestinian civil society in a phase of national struggle. Their political ideologies have been formed and strengthened within the cultures of various factions or political groups, and they play an active role within the political structure of the PA. The same approach, within the framework of a 'state-building' process, was fostered by international donors who commissioned numerous women's CSOs to promote and support peacebuilding process through mechanisms as Gester (2013) and Jad (2007, 2018) argue. While some people have remained actively involved in organisations within the Palestinian liberation

movement, they are now also increasingly engaged in working with NGOs funded by international donors; this is partly because they experienced limited opportunities to participate in the change process after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the 1990s (Natil, 2012, pp. 166–182).

Those CSOs always employ their international networks to increase cross-cultural exchanges with other International NGOs to highlight the issues of women's rights. Islah Jad (2007), however, argues that this rights-based approach has de-legitimised the women's organisations. Despite the fact of some local criticism, a group of young women leaders representing Society Voice Foundation from the West Bank participated in a 10-day young persons' exchange programme in Belgium in July 2013. This programme funded by EU and aimed at contributing to develop CSOs' operations and values such as gender, equality, and cross-cultural and international dialogue with other cultures and civilisations. The programme allowed them to engage in cross-cultural and international cooperation activities based on thoughts and visions with groups from Malta, Belgium and Jordan. This programme also allowed for participants' CSOs to synergise their existing activities with other programmes implemented and funded by the EU (Al Khateeb, 2016). This relationship, however, does not guarantee the CSOs' grants and donations without the proposal of a quality and well-structured project relevant to the donors' scope of work, intervention, conditions and values.

This shift of the CSOs' political and national agenda and operations has weakened the interventions of women's CSOs. The recipients of the US government's funds, for example, had to sign an 'anti-terrorism waiver', obliging them not to support violence or channel funds to any people who are affiliated with 'terrorist groups' and/or violent activities (Challand, 2009, p. 104). The recipients of the EU's aid, however, were not required to do so. There were tens of small and newly emerged CSOs that were established between 2002 and 2005, in a response to the easily accessible funds of the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Tamkeen Civil Society Project, managed by the branch office of Care International in the Gaza Strip. Tamkeen aimed to ensure:

increased participation of Palestinian civil society organizations (CSOs) in public discourse to contribute to preserving the critical 'space' occupied by Palestinian CSOs, placing them at the heart of the communication nexus between citizens and their public representatives at the local and national levels. (Chemonics International, 2005)

A number of recipient CSOs implemented civil society activities, including raising awareness of voting and participating in legislative and local elections. Those CSOs responded to the available funds by establishing CSOs to get the funding and implementing civil society activities during the time-limited period between 2002 and 2005. A number of those CSOs that signed the conditions and documents of USAID closed their offices and no longer existed once the project had been completed and the opportunity for funding had closed. Those CBOs had no vision and/or capacity to expand their own network to reach international organisations and donors. The EU, however, has already developed a longstanding relationship with Palestinian CSOs and provided them with essential support for a range of various initiatives in the fields of gender, culture, good governance, human rights and peacebuilding. In July 2014, the EU adopted a 'Roadmap' for the EU's better engagement with Palestinian civil society ([EU Representative Office Jerusalem, 2017](#)).

Those CSOs believed that the funds allocated by the US government to support Palestinian CSOs aimed at promoting the image of the US government, which endorses the policies of the Israeli government in occupying the Palestinian land and denying the right of the Palestinian people to independent statehood. Those CSOs believed that being a signatory on USAID's documents would contribute to validating the United States' policy, which does not support the Palestinians' rights. Some CSOs did not sign documents to promote the image of the United States in the OPT while the United States still denied the Palestinians their rights. Some progressive CSOs also rejected changing their own priority, scope of work and policies to get funds in order to support civil society activism and the engagement agenda as Refqa [Hamalawy \(2017\)](#) says:

There is no fund without condition. If there is a fund, the donor imposes conditions.

There have been, however, a number of women activists who believe that foreign aid, including from the EU, contributed to promoting the concept of women's political participation, but it still has a negative impact on civil society programmes and capacity building ([Al Samak, 2018](#)). Some donors have special agendas and conditions on specific community activities and do not support certain organisations that sympathised with certain political groups; however, there are some donors who have no political or conditional agendas. Foreign aid also made limited contributions to civil society activities, women's activism and engagement because the projects' funding, target groups and duration were limited. These projects, however, contributed to raising women's awareness of issues of elections such as laws, campaign management,

advocacy, and building alliances between various groups of mutual interest (Siam, 2016).

Foreign aid also plays a role in weakening civil society and its leaders, despite promoting the concepts and values of women's social and political participation. Some CSOs, for example, tackled issues that are not a priority, such as gender awareness. Gender awareness has not been a Palestinian priority as it was imported from the donor community, and CSOs responded to the call for proposals launched by donors. Jad (2007) argues that through professionalisation and projectisation brought about by foreign donors to promote 'civil society', a process of NGOisation has taken place. It also redirected the priorities according to the donors' agenda, and CSOs wasted time and resources in seeking funding to maintain their own existence rather than focussing on urgent needs and urgent issues. As the journalist Mrs. Tagreed Al Mour states, 'Foreign aid and its agenda affected negatively affected women's movement because it is not sustainable despite its importance impact on women's political and social participation' (Al Mour, 2016).

These concepts enlighten and raise awareness of modern issues of empowerment being organised and of participating in social and political activities; however, these CSOs have been unable to influence marginalised groups and introduce a positive change (Al Samak, 2018). CSOs have a limited capacity to challenge and contribute to the policy-making processes that could tackle poverty alleviation and civil society empowerment, and this is because they face an unstable political environment and funding crises. In addition to these challenges facing CSOs in the field, major international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) often control and monopolise resources. For example, both local and international NGOs often submit applications in response to the same funding calls made by major international donors such as the EU, USAID, and other governments and agencies (Natil, 2016).

INGOs often prove more successful than their local counterparts in bids to secure funding because they can draw on advanced technical capacities and expertise as well as significant established networks of contacts to win over donors. Similarly, it is easier for the United Nations Relief and Working Agency (UNRWA) to acquire funding for its programmes and overheads from donor governments than it is for local CSOs to achieve the same results. As a result, many INGOs work directly with the beneficiaries of aid and avoid direct partnerships with local CSOs, and highly trained staff are recruited from outside the region. This situation weakens the capacity of local organisations, which, when they are involved at all, are treated as subcontractors rather than as partners (Murad, 2014).

These challenges influence the sustainability of CSOs; they also affect their ability to provide rapid responses to urgent needs in general and to cater for women's social and political participatory empowerment in particular. This drop in foreign aid to CSOs has already affected women's scope of work and their ability to influence the political structure and landscape. Many donors, however, who pledged to support the process of rebuilding the Gaza Strip at the Cairo conference of October 2015, have already failed to channel funds to do so. Delays to foreign aid have also affected the humanitarian circumstances, as people have been waiting to rebuild their houses since 2014. CSOs could not play a role in the reconstruction process of the Gaza Strip after the destructive war of 2014 despite the fact that the process was controlled by few officials without the real participation of grassroots activists (Siam, 2016).

Foreign aid remains, however, essential for civil society, peacebuilding and development programmes' implementation (Baliamoune-Lutz, 2016, pp. 320–341). CSOs and UNRWA, however, dealt with the most severe financial crisis since its establishment after the Trump administration withdrew its contributions to UNRWA, which amounted to \$359.3 million in 2017. This included \$231.5 million of 2017 bilateral economic assistance that was originally intended for the West Bank and Gaza, including \$25 million for East Jerusalem hospitals. USAID also ended its assistance to the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Zanotti, 2018). This funding cut has had a very serious impact on the local Palestinian CSOs and increased challenges of CSOs to respond to new massive challenges as they struggle to meet citizens' needs and demands efficiently, not least because resources are sorely lacking after years of blockades in the Gaza Strip (Srou, 2018).

CROSSCUTTING INTERESTS

The EU and the UNRWA developed a strategic partnership that has aimed to achieve the objectives of the protection needs of Palestinian refugees and the promotion of stability in the Middle East for more than four decades now. The EU has been considered a main donor for Palestinians since 1994 (Fattal, 2010). Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, said Today we reaffirm the EU's political and financial support to UNRWA, with an overall contribution from the EU and its Member States of €1.2 billion for the past three years. UNRWA is essential for the perspective of a two-state solution. Supporting the agency means supporting peace and

security in the Middle East. And this is in our strategic interest' (European Commission, 2018). The UNRWA was established on 8 December 1949 to support the Palestinian refugees. It became operational on 1 May 1950 and was mandated firstly to relieve the humanitarian crisis and disaster that was being generated in neighbouring countries by the influx of refugees who were fleeing the emergent State of Israel, and secondly to provide assistance and protection to what is today some 5 million registered Palestinian refugees. The UNRWA is mandated to provide social, relief and education services for the thousands of women refugees who have been born and brought up in these areas in the period after the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993. It delivers operations under the aegis of its 'human development and humanitarian services' (UNRWA, 2016a). To this day, the UNRWA manages schools, food aid, clinics and hospitals as it strives to deliver vital services to refugees. Its mission is to help Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, healthcare, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance. The UNRWA was created with a remit to deliver services and assistance wherever Palestinian refugees are located until their problem is solved. In order to assist in social healing, the UNRWA also established grassroots centres for young people in 26 refugee camps in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the early 1950s. These centres continue to deliver support to women refugees in the form of activities related to socialising and culture, and they also provide education and recreation services. A part of the Agency's comprehensive approach and targeted interventions are combined with gender mainstreaming to address gender gaps. As such, the UNRWA delivers legal counselling and psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). It also provides preventative measures such as activities raising awareness of GBV. It also provides opportunities for women to become economically self-reliant, as the Young Women Leaders Programme (YWLP) does today in the Gaza Strip (UNRWA, 2017b).

In relevance to the principles of partnership between the UNRWA and the EU, the UNRWA has already worked closely with 50 CSOs to provide essential technical and financial support to these women's centres, run and sustained by civil society activists despite frequent reductions in the forms of assistance they receive. The UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestinian refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. The YWLP is one of the most important women's leadership programmes implemented by the UNRWA. This programme includes techniques to promote

young leaders' engagement and active participation by responding to the dire economic situation in the Gaza Strip (Young, 2017). It also seeks to empower the skills of young leaders to access the economy and the labour market. It aims to bridge the skills gap between the labour market's needs and women's participation by ensuring that women aged between 22 and 28 are developing transferrable skills and gaining experience.

The relationship between young leaders and the grassroots level, however, should be strengthened, and young leaders should engage actively with the target groups. Civil society leaders use women at the grassroots level to achieve their personal objectives. Samira AbedAlleem, a CSO leader, says:

Women are not doing enough to support their fellow women to achieve core issues. There have been many women who victimised need ongoing support, not only one month or two months. The relationship between the CSOs' leaders and the target groups or victim women finishes once the services are delivered. Many CSOs, however, focus on fighting violence amongst other needs but there have been no changes on the ground as the political environment has not been changed. Women, for example, protested against murder but what was the influence and impact of their protest on the decision-making process and policy makers? (AbedAlleem, 2017)

The UNRWA's Gender Unit signs agreements with the selected CSO delivery services to provide capacity-building activities relevant to the programme's scope of work. The UNRWA invites local CSOs to submit service delivery proposals outlining a clear plan of activities to empower women's capacities and gender equality. The CSO delivery services are selected based on certain criteria relevant to the international standards of the UNRWA. These CSOs must have strong previous experience and professional standards in delivering similar activities and working with international donors, and must also have good governance practices. These criteria are normally limited to the Gaza Strip, owing to there being few professional CSOs working in the field of empowerment and grants management according to donors' procedures (Young, 2017). The programme also contributes to developing civil society engagement and partnerships between local and international organisations. The UNRWA's Gender Unit, for example, works closely with at least 50 small CSOs from different locations of the Gaza Strip based on a clear partnership after signing a memorandum of understanding. The work of this unit has a crosscutting interest with the EU–UNRWA partnership to serve Palestinian civil society (UNRWA, 2018).

The UNRWA also assists these CSOs, working at the grassroots and local levels, with getting engaged in implementing the activities of the programme.

They attend capacity-building activities, delivered by local CSO services. The UNRWA's Gender Initiatives Unit always evaluates the programme and develops it based on the progress and the need of Gazan society. The programme will expand its operations to persuade the private sector to increase the recruitment of women who can play a role in improving the economic sector in Palestine. However, the public and private sectors hire women for secretarial work, not leadership positions. The civil society sector is in a different position, as here women lead organisations and programmes like men and challenge the status quo. The programme's valuations, however, recommend engaging with the private sector to recruit more women to access the market. There are many employers from the private sector who still prefer to hire men, owing to a number of social and cultural norms, including the avoidance of the provision of maternity leave. Palestinian society is getting much more conservative, owing to the ongoing lack of opportunities and the economic and social circumstances that have occurred during the last 10 years (Young, 2017).

Through this leadership programme, the Gender Initiatives Unit tries to alleviate the impact of extremely high unemployment rates in the Gaza Strip, a result of the 12-year Israeli economic siege of Gaza and four military attacks since 2008, which have exacerbated an already deteriorated economy and its capacity to create jobs. The unemployment record of the female youth – at 80% in quarter two of 2016 – is the highest joblessness rate among all social groups in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. The average unemployment rate stood at 41.7%. The UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions, and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs (UNRWA, 2016b). This programme is related to the UNRWA's gender equality policy, adopted in 2007. The UNRWA's policy provided the first clear framework for gender mainstreaming and more systematic women's empowerment under its mandate. The policy was followed by a gender mainstreaming strategy (2008–2015), which was replaced in 2018 with our Gender Equality Strategy 2016–2021. These three documents are key to understanding the policy and strategic framework for the UNRWA's role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through its service delivery, and also for more targeted interventions such as the Gender Initiative under which the YWLP, among other components, is delivered (Young, 2017). However, there have been a number of Palestinian activists and academics who do not believe in international donations for women's empowering leadership as Abu Sharkh (2020) says:

I do think and rightly so that the international donations were not given to help Palestinian women be more resilient or steadfast rather the fact goal was to penetrate the Palestinian society.

These donations were only given to organise workshops of the fundamental importance to our society. These donations were of marginal values as they never contributed to build any kind of infrastructure in addition these donations tried to distract the attention of men from the ominously-agreed goal i.e the struggle to end the very occupation of and, because the freedom of Palestinian women can be achieved through the freedom of Palestine.

LIMITED IMPACT

EU-sponsored women's empowerment projects in the OPT, however, did not succeed in empowering leaders who can participate in local elections without the direct intervention and influence of political groups. The recipients of foreign aid, for example, CSO leaders with progressive thought agendas, failed to organise themselves into one electoral group to run for election to the local councils (AbedAlleem, 2017). In early 2017, the PA attempted to run local elections in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, but the elections did not take place in the Gaza Strip, owing to the conflict between the Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip and the PA in the West Bank. The judicial system, dominated by Hamas members, disqualified a number of nominees from the national movement Fatah, the political group of the PA, from running for elections. During the final preparations for the elections that were cancelled, owing to the conflict between the PA and the Hamas, the political groups nominated young leaders who were unqualified and never attended empowerment activities. There was not a single woman at the top of an electoral group running for local council elections or leading a group of nominees. Women leaders are only interested in leading CSOs, looking for salaries and incentives.

CSOs, however, should focus much more on issues of violence, poverty, unemployment and payment discrimination against women. CSOs mostly repeated the same activities and targeted the same groups. Some target groups were not qualified to participate, for example, in activities on women's leadership, but those women preferred to participate in order to get out of the home, without any future benefit. Some women seek to participate in any activities to keep a good relationship with grassroots organisations to benefit from food vouchers if CSOs implement food security programmes funded by foreign aid. There are, however, many independent participants, not affiliated to any political groups, who are well qualified and with much better degrees than the target women of progressive groups. CSOs and their leaders have done nothing to reach out to those independent women who are isolated and

marginalised in their own communities and houses by poverty and probably violence as well. Samira AbedAlleem, a civil society activist, says:

[...] there has been no engagement with the grassroots, for example, there were tens of projects, delivered post Gaza, war psychological support, childhood protection, reconstruction and relief activities but were no follow up activities to keep women engaged or involved with civil society organisations. (AbedAlleem, 2017)

The current leaders of CSOs also fail to identify realistic programmes to introduce social change. Leaders still consider the political discourse and ideological theories, and they cannot mix political discourse and civil society activities based on the priorities and needs of the grassroots leaders themselves who live under occupation. Women's leadership fails to challenge the political groups that still dominate the political landscape. The majority of CSO leaders have failed to get engaged and interact with their own people, individuals at the grassroots level and marginalised women to assist them with finding solutions for their social and economic problems at grassroots levels. Refqa Hamalawy, a civil society leader, says:

Leaders of women's civil society groups believe that they are leaders but in fact they are not because they are controlled by their political groups and concerned about their own salaries and incentives. Have CSOs made any efforts to assist those women to find jobs despite the fact there have been many initiatives, controlled by certain politicians and groups? Now, women leaders are concerned about their own social life much more than other issues, owing to the impact of the political division on the economic circumstances and social structure of the society at large. (Hamalawy, 2017)

There have been, however, a number of women activists who believe that international funding has promoted the concept of women's community participation (Al Samak, 2018). Some donors, however, have special agendas and conditions attached to specific community activities and do not support some women's organisations, that sympathised with certain political groups (Al Mour, 2016). However, there are some donors who have no political or conditional agendas. Foreign aid also made limited contributions to women's political participation because the projects' funding, target groups and duration were limited (Amer, 2016). These projects, however, raised women's awareness of issues during elections such as laws, campaign management, advocacy and building alliances between various political and social groups of mutual interest (Siam, 2016).

Women CSOs respond to EU's calls to tackle issues, which are not a priority such as gender awareness. Gender awareness has not been a Palestinian priority as it is imported from international donors and CSOs responded to the call of proposals, launched by donors (Murad, 2014). It also redirected the priorities of women according to the donors' agenda and women's organisations wasted time and resources in seeking funding to remain in operations rather than focussing on women's needs (Al Mour, 2016). These concepts enlighten and raise women's awareness of modern issues of empowerment organising themselves and participating in social and political activities; however, these women's organisations have been unable to influence marginalised women and introduce a positive change (Al Samak, 2018). CSOs have limited capacity to challenge and contribute to the policy-making processes that could tackle poverty alleviation and civil society empowerment, and this is because they face an unstable political environment and funding crises. In addition to these challenges facing CSOs in the field of women's empowerment, major INGOs often control and monopolise resources. For example, both local and INGOs often submit applications in response to the same funding calls made by major international donors such as the EU, the USAID and other governments and agencies (Natil, 2016, pp. 78–82).

These challenges influence the sustainability of CSOs, for example, working for women's community peacebuilding and development. They also affect their capacity to provide rapid responses to women's need in general and to cater for women's social and political participation empowerment in particular. Many donors, for example, who pledged to donate \$5 billion to the Palestinian territories, of which \$3.5 billion intended to support rebuilding the Gaza Strip at the Cairo conference of October 2015 (The World Bank, 2018). Delays in receiving foreign aid also affected women's humanitarian circumstances who have been waiting to rebuild their houses since 2014. This delay in foreign aid to women CSOs has already negatively affected the capacity of women to influence and participate in political structures. Fida Amer (2018), a civil society activist, said:

the aid cut has already left a negative impact on cooperation between UNRWA and wide spectrums of CSOs and NGOs as thousands of target groups were deprived from services in the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip.

Women's CSOs could not take a role in the reconstruction process of the Gaza Strip after the destructive war of 2014, despite the fact that the process was controlled by few officials without the real participation of women (Siam, 2016). Major INGOs continue to have a limited impact on women's empow-

erment and incur high operational expenses. Some INGOs also play a role in weakening the women's movement by relying on international donations and its leaders, despite having aims of promoting the concepts and values of women's social and political participation (Jad, 2018).

Local women work on civil society issues as community participation and development, however, forms an integral part of the local context and contributes to the delivery of important developmental and nation-building agendas. It is crucial that local communities endorse women empowerment programming that is designed to help young women to better understand their rights. It is also important that internationally funded projects do not ignore the Middle East conflict's historical and political context and the contribution of women to the Palestinian cause. It is hoped that these programmes will provoke the transformation of women into peacebuilders and advocates for human rights practice and education both before and after any comprehensive peace agreement prevails. The funded work with young women will continue to have very limited impact on the peace and development agenda for as long as the occupation and division maintain a status quo that is characterised by violence and fragmentation.

CONCLUSION

EU aid is not only essential for programmes' implementation in Palestine but also remains a central factor for survival and security. EU aid remains essential to empowering women's active engagement and participation for the development and empowerment of civil society. Palestinian CSOs, however, still contribute to civic engagement and the 'development' process under foreign occupation. However, some Palestinian professionals and experts from different fields believe that there is no development without economic empowerment as long as the occupation still exists. They also believe that foreign aid is a not realistic vehicle for development and takes them from one stage to the next. Women should be empowered by investing in the local resources, including their own skills and capacities. There is no comprehensive development without active social and participatory empowerment.

However, despite these challenges, some international donors have sought to promote conflict resolution in the Gaza Strip by providing very limited funding to local CSOs and the UNRWA. They have helped to engage young people in community activities that train them in dialogue and peacebuilding. A very limited number of CSOs have succeeded in securing small-scale funds for their conflict transformation activities. These donor-driven activities have been challenged by a number of internal and external circumstances and factors that include violence, occupation and divisions between the PA and the Hamas. Still, they have achieved results. Those CSOs have worked successfully at grass-

roots levels to train young leaders from different social and political backgrounds, including refugees, in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and human rights. As an indicator of behavioural change in the young people involved, a number of trainees actually went on to engage in the project's implementation and conducted advocacy activities such as town hall meetings and the broadcast of 36 radio programmes on dialogue, tolerance and reconciliation themes.

The EU donor community must, therefore, renew its efforts to increase support for operations of grassroots activism and engagement, including women's social and political empowerment. The international donor community must exert significant influence over Israel's decisions, and its members need to work creatively to achieve justice and establish human rights, which include respecting the rights of civilians and their movement according to international law. Within the OPT, international donors must prioritise civic engagement that is centred on the social and economic development of the community. In their funding of such initiatives, they should also address the shortages of funding provided to local CSOs that work with grassroots, vulnerable and marginalised groups.

The EU should consider direct cooperation with local CSOs, as has been done elsewhere, as major INGOs continue to have a limited impact and incur high operational expenses. In its entirety, international funding for women's work forms an integral part of the local context and contributes to the delivery of important developmental and nation-building agendas. It is crucial that local communities endorse activism, peacebuilding and engagement programming that is designed to help young people better understand their rights. It is also important that internationally funded projects do not ignore the conflict's historical and political context or the contribution of young leaders to the Palestinian cause. It is hoped that these programmes will provoke the transformation of young people into peacebuilders and advocates for human rights both before and after any comprehensive peace agreement prevails. There are substantial grounds for optimism, but funded work with young leaders will continue to have a very limited impact on the Palestinian peace and development agenda for as long as the Israeli occupation maintains a status quo that is characterised by violence and fragmentation.

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WOMEN'S GRASSROOTS PEACEBUILDING ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses women's engagement in resolving community disputes despite the fact of cultural barriers and social conservatism. This chapter presents and shares cases studies of some women with lived experiences of grassroots community peacebuilding education and intervention activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). To what extent has women's engagement in grassroots peacebuilding increased their participation in decision-making process? This explains how they contribute to grassroots and local peacebuilding activities to change their circumstances. Vulnerable and grassroots groups and women in particular are still neglected and excluded from community development and democratic participation including peacebuilding at the formal institutional processes. Their active, profound contribution and multifaceted engagement have been largely invisible in peace process even after UNSCR 1325 'usually are informal, and hoc and rarely part of formal peace process, so their stories often drift and unacknowledged' (Porter, 2007, p. 1).

A female teacher can employ education to increase peacebuilding, a specialist/leader employs active listening and mediation to solve family and social problems, and two civil society activists engage in community development and human rights programmes, employing a community participatory approach to contribute to grassroots peacebuilding (Natil, 2020b). These examples of women community peacebuilders' challenges and achievements introduce the grassroots approach of civil society peacebuilding, rather than that of formal state institutions. It discusses the active and influential role of women in a bottom-up process rather than a top-down approach through

formal state institutions (Noma, Aker, & Freeman, 2012, pp. 7–32). Women are still neglected and excluded from community development and democratic participation, including peacebuilding, in formal institutional processes. Their active, profound contributions and multifaceted engagements have been largely invisible in peace processes (Porter, 2007, p. 1). Sharing information about their achievements and challenges in peacebuilding at the grassroots, national and international contexts of conflict are relevant to women's social and political empowerment and the international community of sustainable peacebuilders.

Documenting and sharing their stories through well-designed grassroots and international platforms show how they have become agents for empowerment, changing peacemaking and peacebuilding in their own communities. There have been, however, a number of Palestinian women who have made an exceptional contribution to their society through practices and concept of engagement in community peacebuilding and education activities (Natil, 2020).

Women, Michael Potter (2008) writes, have long been distinguished at the forefront of peacebuilding efforts. Their engagement in grassroots peacebuilding is much more visible while men take part in the formal political process. Women's integration into all peace process, therefore, is very important in the reconstruction and rebuilding process, following the conflict (Potter, 2008, pp. 142–143). Sharing information about their achievements and challenges in peacebuilding at the grassroots, national and international context of conflict is relevant to women social and political empowerment and civil society engagement as Elisabeth Porter discusses (2007).

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Women are often described as victims and marginalised in leading formal political and institutional processes, but they are powerful agents for community peacebuilding education in the context of conflict (Arostegui, 2013). Islah Jad (2007), however, argues that the Non-Governmental Organisations' (NGO) leaders use the language of expertise and professionalism and emphasise their links with international donors. Hanan Hroub, a teacher from Dheisheh refugee camp in the West Bank, for example, promoted practices and concepts of peacebuilding education and practices in her class. Education is a significant tool for the Palestinians to struggle peacefully and represent their identity and society in the international arena. Elisabeth Porter (2007) discusses positive examples of women's peacebuilding in comparative international contexts.

The Varkey Foundation, an International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO) supporting education worldwide, awarded Hanan Hroub the Global Teacher Prize for her teaching excellence on 14 March 2016. Hroub employed a technique of 'play and learn' to provide peace, harmony and security for her students who had special education needs owing to the long foreign occupation (Natil, 2016a).

Based on participatory approaches, the priority of young women and the entire female community in the OPT is now to accommodate and provide the basic needs for their families and children who witnessed the many cycles of violence and subsequent military operations (Natil, 2020a). They are encouraged to emulate Hanan Al Hroub in her success story of employing new techniques of community peacebuilding. She competed against 8,000 international applicants to win the \$1 million prize, presented to her at a ceremony in the United Arab Emirates. She grew up in the Dheisheh camp and her family suffered from the violence of occupation when her husband, Omar, and two of her daughters were shot at by Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint near Bethlehem. Dheisheh refugee camp is located in the West Bank city of Bethlehem. Hana's husband, a lawyer, was injured in the shoulder and her daughters were traumatised. She won the global prize, owing to her philosophy to influence the children in her own classroom.

In addition to Hanan's story of success at the international platforms, there have been a number of female teachers who promote values such as tolerance, human rights and conflict resolution at United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. UNRWA was established on 8 December 1949 to support Palestinian refugees. UNRWA manages schools, food aid, clinics and hospitals as it strives to deliver vital services to refugees (Gunnarsdóttir, 2006, pp. 10–12). In order to assist in social healing, UNRWA mentors a network of 104 grassroots centres, managed by volunteers, 63% of whom are women (Gunnarsdóttir, 2006, pp. 10–12). These centres continue to deliver support to women refugees in the form of activities related to socialising and culture, and they also provide education and recreation services. UNRWA is mandated to provide social, health and education services for all Palestinian refugees. It delivers operations under the aegis of its 'human development and humanitarian services' (UNRWA, 2016).

In 2001, UNRWA introduced its Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance programme (HRCRT) for delivery across all grades and schools in each of UNRWA's five fields of operation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. UNRWA contracted the Palestinian Centre for Conflict Resolution and Democracy to develop the textbooks that promote concepts of conflict

resolution through school programmes, which teach human rights, tolerance and conflict resolution. HRCRT relies upon international human rights codes including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the World Programme for Human Rights Education, which is coordinated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Pinto, 2014, pp. 57–74). Human rights education plays a significant role in transforming the societal structure and proper bases for transition needed to a stable society. Implementation of UNRWA's human rights and conflict resolution programme involved the training and hiring of female teachers charged with implementing it in schools (Natil, 2016b, pp. 78–82).

Despite these great efforts, UNRWA has still drawn criticism from some local groups in the Palestinian society, which claim that conflict resolution ignores Palestinian suffering. However, despite these challenges, some local civil society organisations (CSOs) have sought to implement informal grass-roots activities of education including training and awareness of community peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Natil, 2020a). Those organisations have succeeded in working with a number of international organisations and donors to implement community peacebuilding and conflict transformation activities. This was a help to engage young women in community activities that train them in dialogue and peacebuilding (Natil, 2016b, pp. 78–82).

These activities, for example, could provide a real indication of changes occurring in the lives of young women leaders who are empowered in the techniques of leadership capacity with emphasis on freedom of expression, community/voluntary work and elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank has been living in very severe circumstances with a lack of human security at different levels, owing to the absence of a peace process, economic development and internal Palestinian division. Palestinian women, during this period, therefore, have witnessed an unprecedented state of poor public freedoms, socio-political deadlock at all levels, owing to the paralysed political system, social and geographic division and the hardship of poor economic life (Al Mour, 2016).

CSOs and UNRWA have particularly implemented programmes with a participatory approach to learning, which aims to raise women's awareness 'with an understanding of their place in the world and a common set of key values, including women's empowerment and gender equality', while also 'helping them develop the skills to thrive as adults in an evolving, challenging landscape' (UNRWA, 2016b). However, CSOs cannot implement its programmes or operations without international aid and assistance. CSOs' activities have

a direct impact on any community peacebuilding activities sustainability and, in particular, citizen's active engagement in community participation actions. Women who call for change, improving human rights, democracy and peace building, face a number of social and political threats (Jad, 2018). Women's activists, leaders and/or CSOs have no real influence over public policies and record a very low level of civic participation. Women are banned from freedom of expression, media freedom, the right of association and the right to organise peaceful actions and marches (Siam, 2016). CSOs' involvement in the community is not only based on a holistic approach combining discussions, training, dialogue and coalition-building, but also on interviews and various interactions with the grassroots groups and other stakeholders. The process is need-based and responsive to the changes taking place and is, thus, able to adapt itself to the requirements of the socio-political environment to explore alternatives.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Elisabeth Porter (2007) argues that complex issues of memory, truth, silence and redress are explored while new ideas on reconciliation and embracing difference emerge. These activities would broaden the base of support for the civic engagement through promotion of communication and understanding of the key elements of empowerment. Local CSOs have implemented activities to target and educate a large number of young women on the values of community peacebuilding. Meanwhile, some CSOs are trying to engage young women via a participatory approach, which combines discussions and dialogue, coalition-building, interviews and various interactions between the young people themselves and other stakeholders. This includes promoting the level of culture and education for civil society activists (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2010, p. 67). These select initiatives are informed by need-based design processes, and so they are responsive to the broader political changes taking place around them and able to adapt to the specific requirements of the younger elements within the population. Politicians often mobilise women and their CSOs to get elected and to achieve very narrow political interests regardless of good governance practices, active grassroots engagement and community participation (Amer, 2016). CSOs are careful to ensure that the implementation of programmes remains inclusive and as broadly based as possible, focussing on empowering women's networks and collective work among civil society actors, as a base for sustainable action. Civil society partnership ensures the actions' success. It also ensures inclusivity and the

active civic engagement of activists with participatory approaches. It uses a principle methodology of process, network, education, communication and change (Natil, 2019, 2020a).

There have been, however, an increasing number of women who challenge the social and cultural context and willing to claim their inheritance rights as a result of awareness-raising and assistance through the lawyers of CSOs. Women are entitled to inherit valuables such as money, property or jewellery, etc., from a deceased parent. There have been a number of cases in which women were deprived of their inheritance. The Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR), for example, uses an approach that fosters mediation and negotiation techniques with women's *mukhtars* together with legal experts to attempt to resolve community disputes between women and their families (Koek, Clutterbuck, & Kafarna, 2015). Mukhtars is a traditional conflict resolution specialist, not elected or a professional mediator/arbitrator. These women's initiatives aim to transform conflict through methodologies of education and training, and they seek to empower young people and women by engaging them in community participation actions. They have used a variety of tools to educate and advocate for community peace (Amer, 2016).

Some CSOs use education to promote reconciliation and dialogue within the community between various competing Palestinian groups. Women's involvement in community activities is a core principle of conflict resolution and community peacebuilding approaches, which also promote dialogue and other peacebuilding mechanisms and tools as Arostegui (2013) argues that:

women's empowerment has come with the education, advocacy, and organisational skills that they developed as a result of conflict – they now have women's networks and women's peace groups, which were not there previously.

Alternative dispute resolution system in Palestine has been playing a pivotal role in internal peacebuilding. The authorities benefit and rely on it as it eases the overload and pressure on the policing and justice system. This alternative system is led by key leaders of resolving community disputes. These leaders are known Muktar 'selective' who are ratified by the PA, the ministry of local government. He is entitled to sign any agreements between the disputants. The title Muktar means a selected person, but not necessarily elected democratically to intervene in resolving the disputes.

There have been, however, a number of CSOs that have already trained young women to serve as 'Muktara' or 'selective' leaders. They were trained group of young women leaders to serve and assist a number of women to

resolve their social and psychological problems as Harb (2017) discusses. Fatin Harb, a young woman is based in the middle area of the Gaza Strip, one of these 'selective leaders' who have already faced huge pressure at the beginning of their job started in 2012, owing to social and cultural stereotyping and challenges. However, conflict gives women multiple responsibilities in their communities as peacebuilders, designing, planning and implementing actions and participation in decision-making and political spaces as Julie Arostegui (2013) discusses. Young women's engagement in different fields is considered remarkable steps towards leadership. But their role in contributing to resolve community disputes is a different and very distinguished one because it was an exclusive role for men. Women were excluded from this role as the society did not allow women to engage or practice resolving community disputes. Women specialists or 'the traditional women intervenors' have already left an impact by serving their society and contributing to solve community problems (Harb, 2017).

Since 1990s, there have been a number of CSOs as the PCDCR organised a number of professional trainings to improve the capacities of those Mukhtar. The Mukhtar is a male and traditional intervener whose familial power, social influence, a well-spoken person and trusted able to intervene in small or and large range community disputes and conflict. However, there have been a number of Mukhtar who are not well educated but they have already inherited from their fathers or family support. Those Mukhtars, however, face huge pressure in intervention if there is a dispute between man and woman or husband and wife, sisters and/or brothers, owing to challenges of cultural and social constraints. They have to rely on qualified female to listen to women's issues and narratives because the Mukhtars cannot listen to women's problems. They serve as a link but in the most cases, the third-party decides on behalf of woman. This deprives women from deciding on their issues and hinders their active participation in decision-making of resolving their own problems. The Centre made a number of efforts and activities to reach a number of young leaders to educate them and empower their capacities to intervene professionally. A team of trainers developed education materials including values, concepts and practices of mediations, facilitations, third-party intervention, arbitration, etc. Olft Anber (2017) suggests:

The society needs desperately 'Women Mukhtara' to intervene to assist in resolving community disputes after the phenomena of violence in the society and against women in particular.

Olft Anber is a mother of 54 years old, the eldest 30 and the youngest 19 years. Her children are well educated. She married when she was 16 years old,

but she was very persistent to change and contribute to her society. She is a strong and very charismatic, heading her family despite the fact her husband is a professional and working full time. Her work of intervention to assist in resolving community dispute increases her confidence and looking after her family (Anber, 2017).

These problems leave very serious on the entire community as the families are very connected and the network of social relationship is very complicated. She believes that cultural orientation, knowledge of Sharia (religious law) and skills of communication and active listening are very essential to assist the parties to solve their own problems. These issues and problems accumulate hatred and social tensions between the families of two parties as the social life and family relationship are so complicated in a conservative society. The police sometimes fails to solve these social problems; therefore, the community peacebuilder is often called to assist in resolving the problems much better in an efficient and professional process better than the police (Anber, 2017).

Anber is from Gaza city who have learnt about activities of women's intervention in assisting in resolving community dispute via the Facebook. Mukatars Association held a meeting to female specialists in making community peace or resolving community dispute. She wondered if she would be a specialist one day to intervene and assisting other women in solving financial and social disputes. In 2015, she joined this voluntary work via Department of National Reconciliation, Fatah movement and the Mukatars' Association. She coordinated with CSOs as the Palestinian Centre for Conflict Resolution and Democracy where she was trained as well. She intervened in tens of local problems between husbands and wives. The police asked Olt to intervene, for example, in a case between couples that had lasted for three years. The police and Mukatars association failed to solve this problem as woman decided to separate from her husband (Anber, 2017).

The role of young women 'Muktara' has been spread out in the Gaza Strip since 2011 after brave efforts done by local women leaders like Harb (2017) to make a great contribution to solve a number of community disputes. Women's social and economic circumstances have been deteriorating during the last 10 years; therefore, 'women Muktara' became a need and a demand. Victimised women, for example, feel secured and protected to share their stories of personal details of marriage, familial relationship, divorce, domestic violence and economic deprivation with trusted and qualified women. Women can communicate and understand each other well without a third-party or guardianship. Victimised women cannot express these issues freely in details in a conservative society with men. The majority of women who are jobless and poor cannot hire a lawyer to intervene in their problems as the legal

process takes longer time and efforts. The traditional process is quicker and often effective.

Woman/Muktara understands well the problems of the other fellow women from different aspect to assist them exploring various range of alternatives to solve the problem. Muktara also assists women to get engaged in resolving their own problems as Fatin Harb (2017) and Anber (2017) discuss. Muktara also assists women to raise their voices, needs and demands to solve their own problems. The cultural context is so complicated, as many families still impose solutions on their daughters and women who cannot decide on their issue. The guardian/father/brother often solves the problem without consultation with women. However, there are few families who consult their women/daughters. Yusr Alatrash, a civil society activist, says:

community peacebuilding is based on peaceful pluralism, away from any form of radicalism and that women have ever been prompted to contribute effectively to community development including the drive towards equality. (Alatrash, 2014)

CSOs' values contribute to the introduction of long-term changes in attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices, and to promote their rights, foster tolerance and understanding of the other by applying lessons learnt from other conflicts in the world (Paffenholz, 2010). Some CSOs also design, broadcast and circulate materials and organise local activities to foster a free press, in order to eliminate the technical and cultural obstacles facing activists and their participation in terms of civil society, community peacebuilding and development. Activism aims at promoting civic participation, freedom of expression and strengthening the basis for civil society dialogue and democratic discourse, with particular emphasis on the role of activists in a media environment (Spurk, 2010, pp. 3–29).

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

The new social media tools and older forms of communication are employed in civil society activities to promote ending the violence and encourage active participation, tolerance, better understanding, balanced reporting and objectivity (Hanafi & Çuhadar, 2010, p. 207). Some CSOs seek to empower civic participation, to enhancing their role in ensuring accountability of government in this regard and to promoting the reporting of discrimination of marginalised groups. CSOs' activists also seek to raise public awareness of their problems and respect for rights by using social media, bringing them into line

with respective international standards, as well as establishing networks of information. Media plays always an essential and important role in increasing concepts of peace and hatred. Media are used to flame hatred among the disputants and fighters (Alkatary, 2014). Another aim of the CSOs is to promote freedom of expression through new media and advocacy campaigns including preparing, designing, broadcasting and circulating materials, and organising activities to foster a free press, in order to eliminate technical and cultural obstacles facing the peaceful public life. As a part of empowering active social participation, many organisations aim at promoting freedom of expression through media and advocacy campaigns (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2010, p. 67).

However, some civil society activists and leaders are banned from freedom of expression, freedom of access to the media, the right of association, and the right to organise peaceful action and marches (Natil, 2017, 2020a). This may contribute to engage some marginalised and vulnerable groups in dialogue, tolerance, civic engagement and community peacebuilding. However, there have been a number of young journalists who introduce common ground media to encourage peacemaking and reconciliation in the Palestinian society. Young journalists also play an important role to create a positive atmosphere and build bridges of understanding between rivals and disputant parties. They avoid rhetoric and adopt a unified and objective discourse aiming at alleviating the conflict and finding common points of understanding and common understanding. Majeda Albelbaisy, a civil society activist, says:

local community is an important drive towards dialogue and tolerance and local media should stay non-biased and help formulate a national media strategy that would assume a fair media role. (Albelbaisy, 2012)

Rewan Alkatary (2014) discusses that the local media outlets are a reflection of any given community and that all community issues should top the agendas of those outlets. The local media networks were being attracted by the new approach and concept of young community peacemakers and their achievements in the field of community peacemaking. Civil society activists, for example, use the social media networks to overcome the shortcomings of representative democracy that has failed to achieve their inspiration of ending occupation, violence and internal division (Natil, 2017). It is necessary to transfer all events and transfer the pulse of grassroots to promote reconciliation and to be broadcast positive statements and distance from the incitement and negative, and must make sure the validity of the news before publication to refute all that could disturb the community peacebuilding reconciliation.

Some local media invited community peacemakers as Olft and Fatin to talk in televised and radio programs to share their stories, views, challenges, activities, learnt lessons and achievements. Rewan Alkatary (2014) discusses that the media should reflect the image of a genuine reconciliation on the ground. Some CSOs also employ media to promote people's rights of participation and contribution to the development of their societies by producing and broadcasting weekly, bi-monthly, and monthly live or recorded TV and radio programmes. They used to invite CSOs' representatives, speakers, experts and practitioners to express and demonstrate different needs of young people. They also record and document their achievements in newspapers, magazines, training materials, weekly and monthly reports, daily memos, grassroots organisation networks, open dialogue with decision-makers, annual reports, websites, social media networks, interviews with key figures and participants, evaluation sheets, and drafting laws and legislation. CSOs, however, are an essential force to monitor the role of the different media in showing, following up and editing events, which generates unique positive impressions (Alkatary, 2014).

Many women are eager to participate even in sporting activities if they are encouraged and motivated by their nuclear families. Mahmoud Nofal provided support and every facility for his daughter Inas Nofat, a young of 17 years from a refugee camp, to become an athlete, breaking both the norms and the traditions of society. She has lived in circumstances of violence and occupation in refugee camps all of her life. She resists the social norms and local culture which discourages girls from sporting activity, and runs in the streets of the Gaza Strip. She insists on being an athlete and has recently won a number of local races in preparation for international tournaments. Her engagement in sport challenges stereotypes and defies the ongoing oppression (Natil, 2016b).

Generally, Palestinians are fond of sport, and football in particular, and many women support their children by using social media networks and Facebook in particular. This includes supporting their participation in international tournaments, as happened with the UNRWA 'under 13' team from the Gaza Strip in July and August of 2016. Women participated actively in writing and encouraging their children via Facebook, while their sons were visiting Sweden, Denmark and Norway for sport participation and cultural enjoyment. Some women went to receive and welcome the players while arriving from their travel on the borders of the Gaza Strip with Israel in August 2016. Tagreed Al Mour (2016), a prominent journalist who had joined the Al Hilal Football Club, a first women and member of the board of directors, said:

I will work to encourage women to participate actively in sport activities and I will organise activities and programs in the club, hoping to contribute to improve women in sport.

Women also use social media networks as a space and platform to share their concerns, happiness, achievements and problems on various social, cultural and political issues. Social media assists women to raise and speak freely on various issues, despite social and cultural restrictions and stereotyping. However, there have been many problems caused by the misuse of social media, as well as the control of family members. Many women suffer from serious family problems owing to the use of social media and Facebook, and these have caused divorces on many occasions. However, many Gazan parents have informed me on various occasions and expressed emphatically that they feel proud and connected to their daughters and sisters more than their sons or brothers. Many women maintain and support their extended families as a matter of solidarity and brotherhood at a time of crisis. They are very loyal to their larger local community when it comes to attempting to make social changes or participate in the decision-making processes at local organisations and/or local councils, if they have an opportunity to do so.

CONCLUSION

Education is a significant tool for reconciliation and active participation in the society at all levels. There have been a number of young people who employed education to make social and culture changes in society at large. Young women leaders, however, are always described as victims and excluded from engaging in the decision-making process at the grassroots and national levels. There have been a number of CSOs trying to contribute to the promotion of grassroots engagement in the decision-making process and increasing their power. Women participate actively in popular and collective public activities to get rid from foreign occupation in Palestine and would decide on their own future. Young women engagement in the activities of CSOs has already contributed to promote values and some practices of dialogue and women's grassroots engagement in community peacebuilding actions. Young leaders always attempted to get engaged in activities if they had opportunities to participate in well-designed civil society activities to changing their behaviours and attitudes to promote and respect peacebuilding and non-violence. Young leaders understand of the impact of non-violence, dialogue and peaceful actions on the society have been essential component of participatory approach to contribute to their society community peacebuilding despite the fact of violence, occupation and the high level of poverty.

This community peacebuilding action was an integral part of internationally sponsored activities funded by foreign aid to enhance dialogue of young

Palestinian in community peacebuilding actions implemented by a number of CSOs. Young people engaged and discussed with experts from the CSOs to learn and practice various concepts of communication, dialogue, tolerance and community reconciliation in the Palestinian territories. They aimed at promoting the culture of community peace and peacebuilding through a number of creative cultural and various talent activities.

Cooperation among CSOs has been essential to enhance self-confidence and active grassroots in social and political actions that would promote the role of different sectors of society in curbing violence and empowering human rights practices. The role of CSOs is to promote the culture of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, the impact of customs and traditions on peacebuilding. It also promoted and raised young people awareness and empowered their abilities and invested their energies. It also contributed to achieve the best building future of concepts of civil peace and consolidate many of the concepts and positive values that contributed to the construction of a Palestinian civil society. These activities would contribute to challenge violence and its impact on the practices of human rights development and good governance.

Young women leaders have had a significant role in supporting Palestinian reconciliation efforts by protesting peacefully for the sake of ending current state of political division and accelerating the reconciliation drive. Community-based peace requires more concentrated efforts by all parties including local society organisations, family institutions schools and others, and therefore, less violence and more protection of community's life can be guaranteed. Young leaders have a great role to play in enhancing principles of dialogue, tolerance and peace by simply preaching non-violence and dismissing all forms of bad values, while instead promoting fine values, such as justice and equality, starting with the family and own children. Women's engagement is also essential for community-based peace, urging women to stick to principles of national unity and dialogue and they need to take part in decision-making process of their communities.

Dialogue should be promoted, especially among citizens. Local organisations should further cooperate and coordinate among each other, for the best of community peacebuilding. Media outlets should start adopting some strategies that would enhance reconciliation and end political division in cooperation with the Ministry of Education to introduce special programs or activities in schools, promoting principles of reconciliation, dialogue and community peacebuilding. CSOs' deliveries and intervention to promote women's engagement in community peacebuilding and/or peacemaking will contribute to increase their participation to social, economic, cultural and political development process of the society. Young women leaders also should

engage actively to influence media works including print, audio and television or electronic. This would guarantee peace and security of local citizens and remove all forms of incitement, hatred and/or division.

This will support some CSOs' work of promoting concepts of community peace and dialogue. This may lead to find new prospects for dialogue among activists, based on public interests, not on factional narrow ones as follows:

- Spreading culture of community peace among all members of the local community, especially women.
- Respecting political pluralism in the society, something that would raise level of democracy and help social, cultural and political groups and institutions succeed.
- Increasing number of meetings and seminars to tackle the issues of community peacebuilding and reconciliation at the internal level.
- Opening to others and reinforcing culture of bilateral relations and respect of others' opinions, exchange of thoughts and expertise for the sake of society.
- Reinforcing culture of dialogue among members of the local community, given the fact dialogue is important for the sake of connectivity and mutual respect within the framework of the national interests.

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WOMEN'S GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT AND NON-VIOLENT ACTIVISM

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines grassroots in non-violent resistance despite social conservatism and the iron fists of foreign occupation and political division. It considers women from various social and cultural backgrounds who have already lived through various cycles of struggle, violence and resistance, owing to the shifting political landscapes since the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967. [Qumsiyeh \(2011\)](#) discusses the popular resistance by introducing the challenges facing ordinary Palestinians as they struggle for freedom against incredible odds. There have only been a small number of women involved in armed resistance, but women all over Palestine have engaged in non-violent struggle or at least 'mother activism', as described by [Penny Johnson and Eileen Kuttub \(2001, p. 37\)](#).

Women's representation and engagement in grassroots, non-violent resistance activities can help promote their contribution to the decision-making process and give them a platform to decide on changes to their society. This can be understood as a form of 'participatory democracy' process, as defined by [Aragones and Sánchez-Pagés \(2009\)](#) and [Hilmer \(2010\)](#). Women's empowerment, however, can be understood through the lens of security, transformative change and participation ([Porter, 2013](#)). This chapter also provides an in-depth examination of women's historical trajectories of engagement in the non-violence movement prior to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). They support their arguments by documenting a number of stories and conversations with people who witnessed various accidents and actions, and have taken a role of peaceful popular resistance in the OPT since 2004. Since the occupation of

the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Palestinian women have used different modes of resistance in their defiance of the Israeli occupation of the OPT.

There have been a number of defiant, resilient and empowered women who have already contributed to this process of resistance, struggle and the development of their society. The popular non-violent resistance, however, has had very little impact on Israeli public opinion since the Israeli occupation in 1967 (Darweish & Rigby, 2015). This chapter also examines the power and impact of the network of women's community organisations, and their coordination and cooperation in undertaking effective actions and campaigns, in order to make change a reality in terms of politics and development as Natil (2014, 2016, 2020) discusses. Women have the power to contribute to the change process by participating in non-violent actions as well as being part of organisations for non-profit activities.

WOMEN'S ACTIVE NON-VIOLENCE

On 7 June 1967, the Palestinian contemporary women's movements, which included all Palestinian social and political spectrums and beliefs, faced a new challenge when Israel occupied the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including Jerusalem as Jad (2018) discusses. They had been part of the national movement that used different slogans to confront the Israeli military administration that exerted control over the population with its military power but allowed Palestinians to exercise their religious rights. In 1969, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was restructured to become an umbrella organisation for some 10 Palestinian nationalist groups, led by the Fatah National Movement under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, who remained in this position for 36 years. The women's movements have been part of the different factions and groups of the PLO, but there have been women's groups affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood Society and Islamic Jihad, which are still not yet a part of PLO. Islah Jad (2018) discusses the Palestinian women's activism between nationalism, secularism and Islamism. There have been a number of women activists who engaged in non-violent, popular resistance actions and believe that the non-violent popular resistance mode is a new concept in Palestinian society (Natil, 2015a, pp. 34–35).

The representative of the General Union of Women was present in the Palestinian National Council and was established and active in exile before the establishment of the PA in the OPT of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1993. On 8 December 1987, the different spectrums of society participated actively in the popular uprising that struck the OPT and continued until

1993. Various national and Islamist groups, including women, used various tools – mainly stones – to resist the occupation. Women's active participation in this popular uprising was a visible expression of national and political awareness (Jad, 2007, 2018).

Women delivered a variety of popular resistance activities, which aimed at establishing a future 'entity' without any politically driven agenda or any single national or Islamic movement leading it. There were a number of women, who took an active role in the uprising events and helped the youth in their resistance activities, arrested during the Israeli occupation. Boshra Al Tamimi, for example, was arrested many times in the first uprising for her active role in the events of 1987. Palestinian woman has never given up her role in peaceful and non-violent resistance, even after her husband and son were arrested by the Israeli occupation forces for their active participation (B. Al Tamimi, 2017).

The Intifada had an organisational infrastructure based on local and popular committees led by youth, coordinated by a 'Unified National Leadership of the Uprising' (UNLU), which in turn coordinated initiatives with the PLO elite based in Tunis. The popular committees led by young people were dedicated not only to organising actions against Israeli forces but also to the provision of social welfare and healthcare, empowering women to participate in economic development and social reconciliation among citizens and encouraging self-sufficiency at the grassroots level (Dawriesh & Rigby, 2015, p. 60). The outbreak of the uprising was, in reality, a spontaneous collective action with no prior planning. It was the result of the accumulation of continuing acts of aggression committed by the Israeli occupying forces against citizens in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from 1967 onwards. This Intifada that continued for seven years and women also took part at different levels as Manal Al Tamimi (2017) says:

I believe popular resistance is a non-violence mode which gives me, as a woman, an opportunity to participate in the peaceful resistance and the struggle to retain the rights and land of my people according to international law. Non-violent demonstrations and protests, working in the land, assisting the families of martyrs and prisoners, and educating the children on the culture of liberation is a mode of non-violent resistance. I lost my parents who were killed by the Israeli occupations when I was 27 days old. I also lost my uncle two months later. I have lost 15 members of my family in total since 1973. I have to continue in their process of peaceful resistance to achieve their goal via participating in events and protests and educating my children, 'mother activism', on resistance.

The popular resistance committees should liaise with Palestinian universities in educating female students about their role, as the universities were a main venue for resistance in the popular uprising of 1987–1993. The first uprising was 100% popular resistance without any Israeli and international participation (M. Al Tamimi, 2017). The images of old women, covered by the international media during the first uprising, sheltering youth and defying soldiers was a mode of non-violence and active participation in resistance. Women also took on a different role in the uprising when the Women's unions, for example, distributed the secret communiqués of the Unified Leadership. This involvement of women in resistance, during periods of popular resistance before the Oslo Agreement, resulted in higher visibility of women's programmes in delivering PLO funds for social relief, visited prisoners and their families, and also performed other activities (James, 2013, p. 19).

The women's movement aimed at the mobilisation of women at the grass-roots level to become engaged in liberation activities and to contribute to ending the Israeli occupation during the first uprising prior to the Oslo Agreement in 1993 between the PLO and Israel. Asad Abu Sharakh says:

Palestinian women were no less as defiant to the Israeli occupation than men, they have been an integral part of the struggle against the Israeli occupation, they became more politicised and joined the different organisations combating the occupation, socially and politically. They have had a leading role and suffered bereavement, prison, torture. They also participated in all demonstrations and resistance, and politically active during the uprising.

Palestinian national growth has been promoted under Israeli occupation since the seven years of the first uprising, or Intifada, took place on the eve of 8 December 1987. The Oslo Agreement was a transitional period of five years, which started in 1994 and expired in May 1999. It was intended to establish a Palestinian state as a result of negotiations, but the process failed and the PA became a *de facto* 'government' under occupation (Natil, 2015a, p. 35).

NEW APPROACH OF THE NON-VIOLENT, POPULAR

The generation of young women who were born during the time of the Oslo Process witnessed the establishment of both the PA and the failure of the peace process including the rapid expansion of Israeli settlement. They attempted to challenge the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the disastrous impact of Palestinian division on the national project after the failure of Oslo process

and the outbreak of the armed second uprising (Natil, 2020). The women's organisations, however, depoliticised after the first intifada and became marginalised from the political arena following the establishment of the PA (Jad, 2011, 2018). They found self-satisfaction in their local communities by providing activities including consultancy on women's legal and social rights (James, 2013, pp. 18–22). Jad (2007) discusses the development of the NGO movement that served to demobilise Palestinian civil society in a phase of national struggle through professionalisation and the foreign donors' attempt to promote civil society. Women's elites who run CSOs and representing women's organisations focused more on donors' organisations and engaged at the international platforms (Siam, 2016).

However, there have been a number of Palestinian groups ready to return to the mode of popular resistance as armed resistance destroyed the national cause during the second uprising. Daweish and Rigby (2015), however, discuss the popular resistance and its uncertain future. Women's engagement in non-violent and popular resistance, however, takes on various tasks and duties including active participation in the confronting and protesting against the Israeli settlements and the separation wall. They participate in solving a number of internal disputes, both emerging and those that have happened, between members of the popular resistance committees. They participate in planning and coordinating the activities of non-violence in the field at the front lines and provide the necessary logistics. Michael Potter writes that women are normally peaceful and like to contribute to peaceful activities in their own societies (Potter, 2008, pp. 142–143). The role of women was limited in the armed second uprising, which was dominated by men's participation while women were active in the grassroots organisations. They, for example, engaged with international solidarity groups and raised their voices before numerous international forums, explaining the suffering of women living under the Israeli occupation. Women's active participation in the actions of the popular resistance contribute to the process of liberation, freedom and ending the Israeli occupation according to international law, despite the fact of Israeli oppression and aggression as Abeer Qassam Al Khateeb, a peaceful activist of the Popular Resistance Committees, says:

We woman engage in the non-violence approach in the West Bank, which aims at ending the Israeli occupation; however, the most sophisticated power and warfare arsenals of the Israeli occupation's oppression and aggression is stronger than any tool we use. The non-violent approach, however, is our will and lifestyle of resistance in rejection of all forms of the Israeli foreign occupation that

violate our human rights and humanitarian international law by confiscating and occupying our land. Palestinian public engagement has been important for raising our voices to persuade the free nations to support our struggle and cause internationally. Our aim of employing this approach of resistance is to pass this mode and technique on to the next generations, showing them that we are still able to resist the occupation despite living under its hard economic and political circumstances. (Al Khateeb, 2016)

Another way in which women leaders engage with the community is by assisting the Bedouin women and their families who reside in area C of the West Bank. The Palestinians' homes and lands in this area are always subject to confiscation and demolition by Israeli settlers and occupation forces. This area is under the full control of the Israeli settlers and the occupation authority, and the Palestinians have no access to the services of the PA. In addition, the PA has no civil or security operations in this area. Women leaders organised a number of donation campaigns to support defiance, resilience and the existence of the Bedouin women and their families in their lands. Families and women, however, continue to worry about the level of violence exerted on women. The Israeli violence against women remains a major challenge to increasing the number of women participating in this 'idealist approach' of non-violent, popular resistance. (B. Al Tamimi, 2017).

Activist women, however, cannot lead a non-violent resistance every week. In the village of Nabi Saleh, for example, events of popular resistance and confrontation take place every week against the theft of land and water by Israelis settlers who live opposite the hilltop village in the settlement of Halamish. Manal Tamimi, an activist, participates, often side-by-side with men and the entire community. The images of women, who are arrested or hurt by the Israeli soldiers in the social media or international media, highlights the suffering of Palestinian women living under occupation (M. Al Tamimi, 2017). Women are active in social media, addressing the public locally and internationally. They also participate at international conferences, sharing their stories of resistance and challenges, and highlighting the importance of non-violence to contribute to the goals of the Palestinian struggle and liberation to end the occupation. In addition to violence, the Israeli occupation forces also spread rumours that a woman would be raped and sexually abused if she was arrested during popular resistance events. The Israelis spread rumours in order to terrify women, preventing them from participating or taking on a role in the events of peaceful popular resistance (Natil, 2019).

The Israeli soldiers also use verbal threats about sexual abuse before the media to keep women away from the events, in spite of the participation of Israeli peace activists and international volunteers. Israeli peace and international activists took a visible role against the separation wall, which was built by the Israelis in 2002. Many Palestinian women activists were hesitant and worried about the participation of the Israeli activists. They, however, appreciated and welcomed the solidarity and participation of the Israeli peace activists in the popular resistance events. Their participation, however, did not encourage women to participate and increased the rumours as [Manal Al Tamimi \(2017\)](#) says:

I also feel the rumours, owing to the participation of the Israelis, often decreases the participation of women. There is still a stereotyping that the Israeli soldiers physically and sexually abuse women who participate in the events. Many of those arrested and released still suffer from this stereotyping and it has been so hard to persuade the older generation of this stereotyping, which has already contributed to decreasing women's participation.

Women also worry about the economic impact when they are arrested, as the Israeli occupation imposes high fines and/or bans them from travel. In addition to the Israeli 'iron fist' measures against women, there have been some local norms that restrict women's active participation in peaceful resistance. Activist women of the popular resistance often work during the week and participate at the weekend in resistance activities that take place on Fridays. This keeps them busy and away from their family commitments. They sometimes also travel between the cities, which involves transportation costs and efforts to return back home ([Al Khateeb, 2016](#)).

These success stories of women's active engagement in and contribution to grassroots non-violence events indicate that young Palestinian women have the potential power of resilience and defiance to challenge the inhumane circumstances of many years. [Darweish and Rigby \(2015\)](#) discuss the conditions necessary for emergence of collective resistance to occupation. The images of women's participation in popular resistance have been visible, side-by-side with young men who challenged the Israeli soldiers at the checkpoints in the West Bank and the security fence or the buffer zone in the Gaza Strip, throwing stones and chanting national slogans. Their participation was a gesture to change the situation via engagement in the various waves of popular resistance. The engagement of younger generations in the wave of popular resistance had already put the Palestinian political factions under pressure ([Natil, 2019](#)).

The factions were concerned about being accused of hijacking and exploiting the current popular resistance by the Palestinian public and youth. If 'the factions' became engaged in the wave of popular resistance, they would be dragged into experiencing rivalry among themselves in their attempts to demonstrate their contribution. Young women and men's participation in the events between 2014 and 2016 occurred without official or underground hierarchical leadership, unlike the first uprising during 1987–1993 or the second uprising of 2000–2004 (Natil, 2015b). They, therefore, participated in the events of violent popular resistance in order to change the status quo, as the various factions, including Hamas, had failed to fulfil the Palestinian national project either through negotiation in the West Bank or armed resistance in the Gaza Strip. Palestinian political factions were hesitant in becoming engaged in this wave of resistance and exercised a policy of 'wait and see', in order to balance failure and success after learning from the failures of the uprising in 2000–2005. Women's active engagement also went beyond the grassroots and resistance events to interact with regional development by responding to the 'Arab Spring' as it hit the surrounding Arab countries. Women took part in various activities when they participated in grassroots, non-violent actions, responding to the waves of change taking place in the 'Arab Spring' countries during early 2011. Young people played a major role in a range of non-violent protests and revolutions against dictatorships in North Africa and the Middle East that ousted the dictators of Egypt and Tunisia, and which became widely and collectively known as the Arab Spring (Pace & Cavatorta, 2012, pp. 125–138).

NEW MODE OF NON-VIOLENCE

These changes motivated young women to work closely with young men to copy the 'Arab Spring' in the OPT. They organised themselves under different initiatives to carry out protests and demonstrations to participate in the change process of their society after political leaders failed to end the occupation by negotiation and/or armed resistance and internal division. They decided to challenge Palestinian division and to try to influence the leadership of the PLO in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip (Natil, 2017, pp. 33–42). They wanted to end the division that started in 2007, which had caused harm to the Palestinian national project and had created a poor image for the Palestinian people in their resistance to end the occupation. On 17 February 2011, a group of young women took a leading role when activists met in one of the cafés in Ramallah city in the West Bank, in order to make

plans for a revolution. They arranged a Skype conversation with four activists from the Gaza Strip to discuss the effective and efficient use of social media in order to reignite events on the Palestinian streets (Natil, 2012, 2017, 2019, 2020).

On 15 March 2011, women and youth groups organised massive peaceful marches and non-violent protests to make a stand against the division and conflict between Hamas and Fatah in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Many young women participated and engaged in the public marches in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Those groups were known as the March 15th Movement and employed different, modern, social media network tools to organise the protests. These protests were the first well-organised marches in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank since 2007. The March 15th Movement posed a real challenge for Hamas and Fatah, and the situation could well have become similar to the phenomenon in Egypt and Tunisia, as the organisers had intended (Natil, 2017, 2019, 2020).

In spite of the failure of this movement, a number of women activists from CSOs and the liberal and political affiliation to the PLO continued their weekly protest calling to end the division between Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the PA in the West Bank. They continued their struggle against the division every Thursday on a weekly basis. Women's groups from Hamas in the Gaza Strip rejected these protests against division from ideological perspectives. The division and ideologies have already influenced the women's scope of work and activities since 1993, in particular, despite their engagement in many grassroots activities of peaceful resistance and 'mother activism' against the occupation. Their engagement and contribution to national work are much more polarised now. The Women's Movement from all groups should focus on resistance against the Israeli occupation (Siam, 2016).

However, women's engagement contributes to the development of their society, peacefully at the grassroots level, national and/or international arena. It also promotes the active participation of women in public life to decide on the future of their society by contributing to the ongoing needs and demands of the different sectors of society, despite the facts of violence and restrictions on public freedoms. The pressure on the society owing to the political siege and deadlock pushed various activists from social and political groups to start organising the 'Gaza great return marches' on 30 March 2018 (Abu Sharkh, 2018, 2020). The activists from various civil society and political groups launched the 'great return marches of Gaza' to run a peaceful protest every Friday before the separation fence between the Gaza Strip and the Israel. The activists planned, organised and engaged in peaceful participatory events as sport, songs, enchanting anthems, planting, tenting, reporting and folklore dancing to protest against the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip.

However, [L. Bherer, P. Dufour, and F. Montambeault \(2016\)](#) argue that the participatory mechanisms are initially conceived and designed as a way for citizens' to have some influence on political and decision-making processes. Local engagement in peaceful and popular marches and protests gives the Palestinians a platform to raise their own political and social demands for changes of their society in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as [Darweish and Rigby \(2015\)](#) discuss.

Women's active participation at the Gaza great marches of return has been visible since 30 March 2018. However, massive participation was curbed by extreme and unjustified violence used by the Israeli forces against the protestors. A young human rights activist, Mohammed [Srouf \(2018\)](#), said

there have been a number of those young people who trained on advocacy and community peaceful actions by many CSOs during the last years who participated in the marches.

Razan al-Najjar, a 21-year-old female paramedic, has been a different symbol of peaceful defiance and humanitarian resistance. Razan was killed by Israeli soldiers on Friday, 1 June while carrying out her humanitarian duties with a local civil society organisation, Medical Relief Society (PMRS), during protests along the separation fence between the Gaza Strip and Israel. Jamie McGoldrick, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, said:

It is very difficult to see how Razan posed such a threat to heavily-armed, well-protected Israeli forces in defensive positions on the other side of the fence. (Natil, 2018)

Women have the power to contribute to their society by participating in non-violent actions as well as being a part of the humanitarian resistance. This engagement in non-violent resistance activities also promotes their active participation in the decision-making of politics and social life. It also gives them a platform to decide on the political and social changes of their society in the current extreme humanitarian circumstances in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. [Boshra Al Tamimi \(2017\)](#) states:

All women should stand beside men in this struggle, as women have been participating in different modes of resistance against occupation. Women's participation, however, in non-violent activities is very limited, as Palestinian families are worried about women's participation in such activity, as the Israeli occupation uses so much aggressive power against all participants. There have been, for example, a number of girls involved in the peaceful national

work, who were arrested during the last few months from their university accommodation in the West Bank. The society is masculine too and prefers women not to participate in these activities; however, they participate in the non-violent activities and can take decisions. There have been a number of women who have occupied senior positions, such as governor, minister and employee. They primarily deliver 'motherhood activism', which is a part of resistance as well.

Women's active participation in popular and collective public activities to rid themselves of foreign occupation may contribute to their empowerment. This form of women's active grassroots engagement to defy the Israeli occupation and their policy of settlement expansion in the West Bank is a challenge to the control and power of Israeli occupation of the area, including Jerusalem, in spite of the very limited impact of popular resistance. This form of resistance is considered a mode of non-violence and defiance of the dominance of radical government since the failure of the 'Oslo process'.

CONCLUSION

The shifting political landscape and escalation of violence and conflict since 1967 have already affected and hindered the civil society process of participatory democracy, which women's social and political empowerment have hugely challenged. However, CSOs have already employed a number of accommodating policies and operations to increase their interventions and activism, in order to promote the values of women's resilience and empowerment.

The Oslo peace process assisted in installing the PA, but it also contributed to increasing the rapid expansion of Israeli settlements, as well as the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the second uprising and three destructive wars in the Gaza Strip. It deepened the disastrous impact of Palestinian division on the national project. The 'Oslo process' did not contribute to the division of the Palestinian 'national house' between Hamas and Fatah, but it divided the geography of Palestine into A, B and C. It aggravated human suffering and affected the capacity of Palestinians to remain mobile, to connect with and move from one location to another, within the West Bank or between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

International organisations should change their roles to assist women's active participation in more political advocacy, in order to influence the Israeli government to end the occupation in the OPT. International organisations should change their roles because popular resistance will not have influence without

international support. The role of CSOs during this period has already been changed, as they were controlled by the monitoring policies of the PA and foreign donors after the events of 11 September 2001. Moreover, CSOs could not lead the popular resistance, as they were limited by foreign donations after the first uprising of 1987–1993. CSOs' mandate and their role changed after the 'Oslo process'.

After the destruction of the second uprising, the limited women's active participation beside men in the demonstration against the separation wall revived the concepts and practices of popular resistance by local, Israeli and international peace activists. In spite of the challenges of occupation and societal conservatism, women took a leading role in non-violent resistance activities in a variety of areas, such as Nabi Salah and Bilin on the West Bank. Their visible role had already become politically powerful locally and internationally, as long as the Israeli occupation targeted them directly and arrested and/or hurt them. The Palestinian activists, however, received visible support from Israeli peace and international solidarity activists who participated actively in the weekly activities, events and protests in the West Bank.

More importantly, it emphasises the significance of women's participation in non-violent, popular resistance despite it having had little impact on limiting or ending the occupation, without third-party intervention and a collective strategy engaging all social and political categories in the OPT. Palestinian women still play an essential role in peaceful resistance to end the occupation and the division despite the complexity of the socio-political context and landscape. If they had many more opportunities and encouragement from political and community leaders, they would achieve as much as men, or more in some roles.

Women's participation in popular resistance in the Gaza Strip represents essential seeds for Palestinian popular resistance and its contribution, despite the vertical and horizontal division separating Hamas and Fatah. The international solidarity campaigns, including the freedom boats that travelled to the Gaza Strip, have broadcast the suffering of the Gazans and the cruelty of occupation to the wider world. However, women also suffer from the functional role of the PA and the changes of local organisations' objectives and activities that challenged the power and strategies of the limited emergence of Palestinian popular resistance after the construction of the separation wall. These challenges add to the uncertainty of the role of women in Palestinian popular resistance and its impact on contributing to the struggle against occupation in the OPT. This includes their level of political participation, which is still lower than expected and they are attempting to increase it.

There have been, however, a number of women who have already broken the traditions and norms during the last few years. They have explored opportunities to increase their active engagement and contributions to their society via an alternative community dispute system, which had been an exclusively male role. In spite of these challenges, women's active engagement in non-violent activities has already achieved some societal changes, which can be summarised as follows:

- Women activists have broken the wall of fear, shame and taboos, imposed by their society and families for years while the images of active women were being circulated via new and traditional media. This encourages women to attain a little of their basic rights in resistance. It also encourages men to support their existence in all forms of resistance. Women's active participation in non-violent activities against both the separation wall and the expansion of settlements, between 2002 and 2014, encouraged many women to participate in the latest wave of popular resistance. During different waves of popular resistance, young men and women used other tools such as cars and stones, etc. Young people (women and men) of the West Bank and Gaza, aged between 16 and 30 years, suffered from a high number of human rights violations, poverty, lack of opportunities, as well as the absence of hope of living in peace and with dignity after years of Israeli colonialism and restrictions to their visiting holy shrines in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The Islamic shrine of Jerusalem represents national symbolism to Palestinians from all spectrums, as Abeer explained: 'the Israeli occupation forces attacked women who protested in the holy shrine of Jerusalem' ([Khateeb, 2016](#)).
- They also persuaded their families of the importance of their participation in non-violence activities. Women leaders invited the mothers of 'martyrs' to participate in the various events of popular resistance. This encouraged some families and parents to accept their women taking an active role in the activities.
- Women's success includes initiatives to resist occupation and support Bedouin families by exercising their rights of existence on their lands in area C of the West Bank in particular.
- Women activists who were subjected to violence by Israeli soldiers received legal documents from Israeli human rights organisations, which support Palestinian national rights of existence and independence.
- They also contributed to the campaign of boycotting Israeli goods and played an effective role in the dissemination of this culture among many Palestinians in the West Bank. ([Al Khateeb, 2016](#)).

- They succeeded in contributing to a number of community grassroots and social solidarity activities, which encourage the next generation of women to become engaged in non-violence resistance, politics and women's political empowerment.

In order to empower women and to become much more active in peaceful popular resistance, Women should be empowered, via participation in capacity building training, to learn about their rights. They must break the wall of fear to contribute to the Palestinian cause, as my participation broke the wall of fear. They are always worried about being arrested and/or being injured. They should enjoy economic empowerment. CSOs have wasted thousands of dollars in organising workshops, conferences and training to raise women's awareness but have spent less on their economic empowerment.

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CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY: WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT

This book provides a specific study on civil society (CS) contributions to active community participation of women, despite the violence, shifts of foreign donors, Israeli occupation and the division in Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). It also examines the peaceful intervention policy of community organisations to institution building. It also delivers a debate on interests, reactions and responses of civil society organisations (CSOs) during the different crises in the OPT. It includes how these CSOs contributed to the peaceful national struggle, community development, relief assistance and documentation of human rights violations by different authorities. CSOs also responded to the needs of the population by delivering social, health, cultural and educational services to all sectors of society during the different harsh circumstances. CSOs also attempted to contribute to the community efforts of influencing and solving the political division in OPT, but the division has been stronger and more deeply rooted than expected at this stage.

Today's women desperately need to become more engaged in CS activities to end the division of Palestinian society. But the dire circumstances have deepened the wounds of society and made the life of people almost unbearable and impossible. This is particularly true of young women where the inhabitants live in an environment where there is violence, occupation, extreme poverty and a lack of freedom. Women and CS face many challenges related to the harsh circumstances imposed by a lack of peace, security and economic development since the failure of the so-called 'peace process' in 2000 between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel. Women's public campaigns were accompanied by a series of supporting activities including live radio programmes, discussion and debate of a number of sensitive issues, as

well as the writing of articles and production of newspapers. These constitute popular techniques and tools of advocacy for women's engagement in decision-making process and public transformation, regardless of any negative or destructive criticism. The CSOs, however, play an essential role in empowering women's civic engagement, community peacebuilding and the local participation and change process in the OPT despite the political and social challenges owing to a number of barriers:

SHIFTING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Political environment is very pressing challenge for the CS in OPT generally. The CSOs have limited influence in the OPT and are unable to challenge or change the de facto circumstances. They could not form an influential body to advocate for economic growth or poverty reduction or advocate for new laws or policies that will protect human rights issues including freedom of expression, rights, minorities, disabled and children. They have, for example, on different occasions, engaged in non-violent and peaceful protests to contribute to the ending of the current circumstances in the Palestinian Territories. However, the contributions and engagement of young women in CS-sponsored programmes is challenged both by the absence of peace in the wake of the failed political process and by the continuation of Israeli occupation and Palestinian division. Foreign occupation generates suppression, oppression and violence, and continues to be a major obstacle for women as they seek to live securely, plan for the future and realise their rights.

These restrictions and complexities of political and social context are reflected at all spheres of life. It has left critical social and deteriorating women's security circumstances. CSOs, however, still have a vital role to play in OPT at all levels, but they could not influence the policies of the governments. They need to operate largely as advocacy CSOs, not only as services delivery. The government cooperate with the CS as services delivery more than advocacy CSOs. The governments are not interested in human rights issues; they cooperate with services delivery. For example, there more than 970 registered CSOs or NGOs in OPT and they play a vital role in development and humanitarian intervention due to different political crisis since 1967. They also engage in but they could not make full change, owing to unstable political environment.

In spite of ongoing criticism for grassroots leaders or and 'elites' who became a part of CSOs or and political system and abandoned the field work and active engagement with the grassroots, there have been a number of

young women who worked via their CSOs to introduce great services and contributions to their societies by promoting society's defiance and resilience. There have been a variety of projects and programmes installed to raise women awareness and the importance of CS values and practices to achieve human rights, peacebuilding and good governance that help bring hope to a young women, despite some of the local cynicism.

LOCAL CYNICISM

I always remember the cynical questions raised by some Palestinian citizens to CS activists 'What kind of civil society under occupation are you talking about?' 'How will local organisations promote and advocate the values of civil society under a territory experiencing foreign occupation?' There are still some Palestinian intellectuals, leaders and activists who do not believe in CS operations and activities in a country under occupation, but they believe strongly in community peacebuilding to restore the order and security of their own society, after years of division and the failure of the 'peace process'. They also go beyond just cynicism and move into absolute pessimism and defeatism by asking: 'How can empowering women in community actions be effective, while they still suffer from the violence under occupation and a lack of freedom?' 'How will local organisations promote and persuade young women to become engaged in activities while an overwhelming majority are poor, jobless and losing hope in the future?' An example is often raised that during the last years, increasing violence in the OPT, owing to the harsh economic and social circumstances. This society, however, has little experience of suicide, as it is known for its spirit of religious education and social solidarity, which have always prevailed and are considered to be the highest in the region.

Cynics believe that talking about involvement in CS actions as women empowerment, gender, civic engagement in OPT is a matter of 'idealism' and 'luxury', a waste of resources and time because they see such pursuits as being only achievable through concurrently obtaining freedom and national independence. Cynics often point out that there were many activities implemented and many women participated at capacity-building development. They enjoyed education, trips and nice food, but not sustained peace or security, as the main cause of the problems, had not yet been solved. These activities passed without any glimpse of hope or peace after the failure of the 'peace process' that led to the breakout of various cycles of violence and Israeli settlement expansion in the OPT and changed both the context and style of life, after massive destruction.

Despite the challenges, the CS is always able to accommodate and response to the urgent matters or crises under occupation while facing organisational, political and financial challenges.

FUNDING AND NETWORKING

CSOs face always a persistent challenge that seeks donors' fund is the difficulty of grant making. There is a need to facilitate this process in OPT. The funds are limited for OPT as a result of global financial crisis and political changes in the region as well. CSOs face huge pressures to sustain their resources and main flow of cash to keep their operations in place. A high staff should keep working tirelessly to face frequent changes of donors' process of grant making and areas of intervention. Major International NGOs (INGOs), however, often control and monopolise resources. For example, both CSOs and INGOs often submit applications in response to the same funding calls made by major international donors such as the European Union, the United States Agency for International Development, and other governments and agencies.

INGOs often prove more successful than their local counterparts in bids to secure funding because they can draw on advanced technical capacities and expertise as well as significant established networks of contacts to win over donors. Similarly, it is easier for INGOs to acquire funding for its programs and overheads from donor governments than it is for local CSOs to achieve the same results. As a result, many INGOs work directly with the beneficiaries of aid and avoid direct partnership with local CSOs, and highly trained staff are recruited from outside the region. This situation weakens the capacity of local CSOs which, when they are involved at all, are treated as subcontractors rather than as partners. CSOs also face a pressing challenge as they do not share information and expertise among each other properly. A number of big and traditional organisations always avoid cooperation with big CSOs for a number of reasons.

INGOs may develop a mechanism to strengthen techniques of network, sharing information and expertise between the big and traditional CSOs and small ones in the region. The sustainability and legitimacy of small and medium CSOs are under threat as they suffer resources flows. INGOs may train young key leaders from the small and medium organisations in new mechanism of fundraising and of how they can adopt to the socio-political environment. For example, they rely on proposals writing and meeting the deadline of bids or call for proposal. They need to engage the grassroots in raising funds for their activities. They should organise charitable events and persuade the

business people of donating for organisations operation cost. They sometimes lose focus of intervention due to urgent actions might be taken place in the region. INGOs might introduce a long-term plan and strategy to develop the small and medium CSOs' capacities of researching, networking and fundraising. They need to learn how they can accommodate their policies without losing the focus of mission and due to the rapid challenges.

LEGITIMACY, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIENTALISM

There is a limited public access to information – a necessary but not a sufficient component of social accountability and existing legislation is only as useful as women's ability to use it. Where coalitions exist, CSOs have strengthened advocacy efforts. Generally, governments work more often with CSOs that do work on service delivery rather than advocacy. CSOs need to be clearer on the objectives of service delivery versus advocacy versus organisational development versus broad support objectives.

There is a gap between the CS and the grassroots in most of OPT. The traditional CSOs are led by some elites who are still isolated or away from the grassroots' engagement. The poor people looks at their high salaries and connected with Western agenda and values. The CS is under threat in OPTs, as it depends mainly on government donors. For example, the survival of the Palestinian CSOs is dependent totally on foreign aids. However, they need always to take certain procedures of accountable processes. CSOs and the private sector in cooperation with the Palestinian government have to build a national plan of engagement and empower young people and their leaders to campaign and influence the policy-makers. The national plan would encourage engaging the media agencies to ensure that development priorities are based on a broad consensus in society. This should also entail that the voices of the poorest women and most vulnerable are heard in the development of the decision-making process. These insecure circumstances are reflected in all spheres of life. Gaza's economy, for example, has actually been virtually stagnant for the past 10 years, with an average annual real GDP growth rate over the decade not exceeding 1.44%, while Gaza's population has grown by 38.4% over the same period (UNDP, 2017).

These circumstances and constraints have already placed marginalised and vulnerable groups and women in particular in risky environment, away from decision-making process and actions of development. Vulnerable and marginalised sectors have already been excluded in many key areas.

WOMEN'S ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

CSOs have to cooperate together in order to empower women's intervention and contribution to improving the situations of the target groups on the concept and practices of empowered citizens. Women need to get engaged fully in a participatory process as an integral part of the women's agenda for democracy. Full CS engagement is to empower 'participation' by planning, designing and implementing a women's national plan. It will start from women's grassroots and CSOs to advocate the public on their needs in the policy-making process. Since the advent of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994, there have been a number of beneficial laws introduced to increase women's political participation through elections, but women's representation is still very low and limited owing to a number of cultural, political, technical and economic factors as follows:

- Women have not exercised their right to vote and participate in public elections for more than 15 years since the Palestinian division struck society.
- Very weak cooperation and team work among various women's bodies and groups. Women elites and leaders are fragmented. There is a competition about who will lead the Women's Movement. There is no collective leadership to represent women. The Women's Movement is divided as well, reflecting the vertical and horizontal division in society.
- The majority of women are not affiliated to any political and/or CS groups and they are controlled by the hierarchies and patriarchies of their families.
- Despite an increasing number of independent CSOs and their works, they have already failed to support women leaders to run for election.
- Expensive campaigns are a main challenge for women leaders who suffer from very hard economic circumstances.

The currently existing laws have contributed to the current status of women, as women face an enormous challenge, owing to divisions in the society and the Women's Movement in particular. They remain on the margins of society and used to vote for this faction or that movement without a real political participation. Women are used only as political 'decorations'. They have no one vision or a strategy to promote their engagement and influence over the policies and empowerment of women's political and social participation at all levels. There have been a number of activists attempting to challenge these circumstances and constraints have already placed women in a worse situation. They cannot even challenge the situation to exist as an effective part of policies and contribute to the policy-making of the development process.

The Women's Movement must seek to acquire women's full rights and participation in decision-making at all levels in the private and public spheres, despite the enormous challenges of the current political circumstances. Tagreed Al Mour, a young women leader, says:

If women succeed to bridge this gap; there will be a real understanding of women's circumstances to design realistic plans leading to positive reflections in the future. (Al Mour, 2016)

They, however, still face serious challenges, hindering their participatory engagement and contribution to end the occupation and division, which can be summarised as follows:

- The conservative and social contexts of society still influence vulnerable and marginalised groups as women's active participation, for example, in the resistance movement. Rumours are considered a main source of news and information for many women. This makes women fearful and suspicious of participating in the activities. Women are worried that these rumours might lead to divorce, separation and division in their families.
- The occupation remains a main obstacle for the Women's Movement in general and resistance committees in particular; in addition to the lack of funding of the Women's Movement organisations. In addition, there have been a number of media agencies that did not take a positive role in encouraging women to participate actively in non-violent events.
- The political division between Hamas and the PLO also influences women's participation to a great extent. Women from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank could not communicate with one another to build a strong non-violence alliance. They have been living in very harsh circumstances, owing to the absence of a peace process, poor economic development and the Palestinian division. Women were not brave enough to take action to help end the division between both sides. In other words, women have already become a part of the division because women's leaders have politically affiliated with political groups. Women have no real voice to influence public policies.
- In other words, women, during this period of study, have witnessed an unprecedented state of poor public freedom and socio-political deadlock at all levels, owing to the paralyzed political system, social and geographic division, and the hardship of a poor economic life. Women are worried about their economic circumstances, as they head their families financially. Many women are controlled by loans and financial obligations and commitments. This makes it very hard for them to put their families in

jeopardy. The overwhelming majority of women are from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank including area C; they are jobless and suffering from a high level of poverty and lack of opportunities.

- A number of women have become part of the NGO system called 'NGOisation'. After the Oslo Agreement, women abandoned fieldwork, as they preferred office work with indoor conferences and workshop participation. Fieldwork and grassroots engagement has not been a priority for them and they find office work an easy job, as well as being prestigious. They feel much more secure with less effort and fewer risks. However, working for a call for change, improving human rights, democracy and peacebuilding would involve facing a number of social and political threats. There have been a number of women who have been banned from freedom of expression, media freedom, the right of establishing associations and the right to organise peaceful actions and marches.
- Women could contribute actively to promote society's values and practices of respecting empowering women's equal social and political participation at all levels. Women could put into practice their new skills of social and political participation empowerment. Women should elect their representatives to different positions in social and political life. They could contribute to improving the social delivery of local organisations from gender and social accountability perspectives. Young women leaders would have a worthwhile opportunity to empower their political practices through community work and by participating in social accountability campaigns.

This will contribute to the promotion of democratic participation and good governance programmes that include anti-corruption and transparency components, empowering women's participation and citizenship. This process will contribute to empowering society to elect professional and qualified candidates for the local councils in the near future, after years of deadlock and suffering. Many 'elite women' still employ NGOs and other CS platforms to raise their voices and demands to the decision-makers. The elite women have lived under occupation and 14 years of political and geographical division between Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip and the PA in the West Bank.

RESILIENCE AND HOPE

Despite the seemingly dire straits of life, the young women are still resilient enough to try change their own situation, by contributing to their society and

engaging in community initiatives. As they work to alter the attitudes and behaviours of women through a variety of CS activities and initiatives, CSOs encounter a variety of political shifts, economic barriers and security challenges. This unstable political environment hinders the functioning of these CSOs as they work to deliver services that empower women about CS and active community engagement. CSOs need continuity of funding support to improve their services and expand their activities in what remains a hostile environment. While these conditions remain, their deliveries and services will continue to be humanitarian in nature and will not be able to focus entirely on working towards sustainable social change, development and community peacebuilding.

These activities, within which the target groups raise their voices, contribute, therefore, to institutionalise active civic participation, engagement and good governance practices. For example, young trainees attempt to put their new skills and knowledge of community participation into practice by engaging and leading community actions. They elect their representatives to assess and monitor the performances of local councils in their districts from community participation perspective. These young leaders have had a worthwhile opportunity of enhancing civic engagement practices in addition to participating in social accountability campaigns. This has contributed to strengthening communications between CS operators and networks by establishing dialogue and trust between interlocutors and different actors, in order to influence policy-making, legislation and law making. This should help many contributors initiate changes to the old laws and establish new ones, responding to women's particular needs and circumstances. The international community must, therefore, exert much more efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace that solves the Palestinian issues in the Middle East. The international community must exert significant influence over Israel's decisions, and its members need to work creatively to achieve justice and establish human rights and support the development of the Palestinian society. Within the OPT, international donors must prioritise civic activism and engagement, that is centred on community peacebuilding and human rights issues. In their funding of such programs, they should also address the shortage of funding provided to local CSOs that work with women people, vulnerable and marginalised groups. In its entirety, internationally supported women's work forms an integral part of the local context and contributes to the delivery of important developmental and nation-building agendas. It is crucial that local communities endorse CS is designed to help women to better understand their rights and engage in decision-making process.

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